

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Children's Changing Perceptions over the course of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1

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# Children's Changing Perceptions over the course of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1

by

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the degree of PhD*

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## Abstract

In this thesis I examine the way in which the changing contexts of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 affect children's perceptions of school and of themselves when they make the transition from Reception to Year 1. Working with 11 children out of a class of 30 who made the transition from the Reception to Year 1 in a two form entry school situated in an outer borough of London, I employed a variation of the 'Mosaic Approach' (Clark and Moss 2001 ) to gather data with the children using photographs, tours, observations and conversations. In order to understand the changing context I gathered further information through interviews with the children's teachers and parents and examined documentary evidence from government and school concerning the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Focusing on the interplay between structure and agency, I undertook an iterative approach to analysis between the field data and literature, which indicated that even small adjustments in teaching styles effected changes in children's ideas about learning through both play and work. The findings also point to links between children's understandings of identity as being either fixed or flexible, their individual priorities and the way in which they experience the transition. The findings from this thesis support the view that it may be more important in Year 1 to focus on a pedagogy aimed at developing flexible mastery orientations to learning using children's interests as a basis for planning than delivering pre-determined curriculum content.

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## Introduction

When we make laws which compel our children to go to school we assume collectively an awesome responsibility. For a period of some ten years, with minor variations from country to country, the children are conscripts; and their youth does nothing to alter the seriousness of this fact. Nor is it altered by the intention, however genuine, that the school experience should be 'for their good'.  
(Donaldson 1987: p13)

There are three main purposes for this introduction; one is to explain the academic and personal aims for the development of the research project and the questions that guided its conduct. The second is to explain my own perspectives on children, curriculum and pedagogy for, as Bourdieu (2003) argues, it is necessary to understand the influences that have shaped our own perceptions- not as some form of confessional, but as a means of alerting ourselves and our readers to the influences of our beliefs on our interpretation of the data. Finally, I will present an overview of this report.

## Aims of the study

This thesis is the result of a project that developed from an interest in two particular areas in the field of education. One was a long term interest in curriculum and pedagogy and the other was a more recent concern with the impact of transitions from one curriculum context to another, with particular regard to how children's thinking and feelings about school were affected by the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. The project also emanated from a belief that children have particular, valid and important perceptions that are key factors in understanding their experiences (Clark and Moss 2001) and that their views should be taken into consideration when making decisions about matters that concern them (UNICEF 1990). This does not mean that children should be allowed to do what they

like, but that it is important for adults to try to understand children's perspectives and to take account of these when making decisions that affect children's lives. Schooling is a big part of children's experiences, especially in countries where it is compulsory, and therefore I deem it important that their views about school are taken seriously.

I have been aware for some time, as I shall explain in the second part of this introduction, of the potential difficulties that some children have when starting school, and that the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 was becoming an increasing focus of concern. As I will argue in Chapter 2, whilst there had been some research concerning the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 that took some account of children's perspectives (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al 2005), these projects tended to use children's views as a part of a general concern for the transition rather than as a focal point for investigation. As I was becoming increasingly aware of the importance of understanding how children make sense of their experiences and the importance of taking their views into account (Barrett 1989, Moss and Petrie 2000, Clark and Moss 2001, Mayall 2002) this research was planned with the belief that what was needed was an in-depth understanding of how children's thinking and feelings about school changed during this transition and grew from the initial overarching question:

*'In what ways are children's perspectives on school affected by the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum?'*

I began with this broad question because of my intention to allow, as far as I was able, data produced by and with the children to be at the forefront of carrying out

the inquiry. It was during the course of the study, as I shall explore in detail in Chapter 2, that the strands of enquiry were developed in response to the data that was generated alongside this process and my own increasing understanding of the context of the transition. At the same time, the project was developed from a particular theoretical view that highlights the importance of context in shaping and delimiting perspectives, and therefore the project was also driven by the question

*‘How does the school context change between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?’*

This question took into account several layers of context including national and school policies and the teachers’ and parents’ perceptions. Chapter 2 will explicate the development of the research questions in more depth.

The project was devised with funding from the Froebel Educational Institute (FEI) that allowed me to carry out the research. Froebel (1782-1852) is considered to be one of the great pioneers in early childhood education (Bruce 1997, Smith 1997, FEI 2011). His beliefs about education demonstrate a concern for the unity of knowledge and the child as a whole being (Froebel and Jarvis 1885, Bruce 1997). According to Smith, Froebel saw the ‘purpose of education [is] to encourage and guide man as a conscious thinking and perceiving being’ (Froebel 1826 cited in Smith 1997:online). To this end, Froebel was particularly concerned with play and first-hand experience alongside the guiding hand of skilled adults as tools for promoting children’s learning in the early years of life (Froebel and Jarvis 1885, Bruce 1997). Whilst Froebel’s ideas have been developed and built on over the years (FEI 2011), these guiding principles remain essentially the same. The transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1

of the National Curriculum is of particular interest to those who advocate Froebelian principles for, as I shall explore fully in Chapter 3, the change can be seen as being from a curriculum that endorses the importance of ‘freely-active employments’ (Froebel 1885:228) to one where opportunities for these become much more limited and the emphasis is on the direct transmission of knowledge and skills.

### **The conduct of the research**

The main fieldwork took place over a period of ten months from when the children were in their final term of the Reception until the end of their second term in Year 1. As the central endeavour of this project was to uncover the subjective understandings of the participants over time, a broadly ethnographic approach was chosen as a basis for the design of the study (Miles and Huberman 1994, Cohen et al. 2000, Emond 2005). This enabled me to use a number of research tools and to tailor those tools to suit the ages and understandings of the children involved in the study alongside comments from parents, using an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss 2001, Clark et al 2005). Interviews with teachers allowed me to gain insights into their thinking about the children and their ideas about curriculum, pedagogy and the transition from the Reception to Year 1.

The children involved in the study used cameras to take photographs of things that they viewed as important about school and talked with me about them in informal conversations, which allowed me to understand their particular interests and concerns. At the same time, a field diary and the review of the literature I had undertaken as a part of the research process provided me with topics on which I wanted to understand the children’s thinking and so some direct questioning was

used. Children's drawings were also used to explore their thinking in some areas, such as sitting on the carpet and their feelings about the beginning of Year 1. Target child observations were used for two purposes; mostly they were used to focus on individual children's experiences to provide complementary data to the photographs, children's talk and drawings. They were also used as a means of gathering data on the day to day pedagogic interactions that the children experienced in the Reception and Year 1. Chapter 2 will give a more thoroughly detailed explanation and justification of the research methods used in this thesis.

### **Personal influences**

In undertaking this project I have had to acknowledge that, although I have been at pains to interrogate the data from many different perspectives and to have made conclusions based upon the weight of evidence, my own perceptions and biases inevitably will have shaped the way in which I have interpreted the data. As I explained in the introduction, it is necessary in interpretive research for the researcher to be clear about their own views and to understand how this might affect the interpretation of data (Bourdieu 2003).

I began this project from the premise that children are active agents; that they actively make meaning and build their identities based upon their interactions with others and with their environment (Giddens 1988, Pollard and Filer 2000, Lawler 2008). From this perspective children are powerful actors in their own lives, strong, resourceful and rich in understanding (Moss and Petrie 2000). Thus children are experts in their own lives (Clark and Moss, 2001) and, given the chance, are capable of making contributions to and negotiating roles in their contexts (Mayall, 1994).

Part of this thesis concerns the building of identities during transition and how these identities colour the way in which we interpret the world. I have to admit to having considerable difficulty reconciling my identity as a teacher with my role as a researcher in an educational setting. As a teacher I have developed a particular philosophy about teaching through both education and experience. My own schooling, for example, allowed me to experience several different schools and different teaching styles which left me with a dislike of overly prescribed teaching. As a teacher, I began my career when the National Curriculum was first introduced. The school that I worked at had a culture of developing thematic learning and therefore had spent much time and effort in making sure that they covered the National Curriculum in their 'topics'. Several of the teachers also had a strong ideal of involving children in making decisions about the learning process. It is fair to say that these influences have inculcated in me a strong belief in the importance and potential of a pedagogy that embraces children's agency as a powerful tool for enhancing learning opportunities.

As a Primary school teacher for ten years, I was privileged to have the experience of working with children across the primary spectrum from the Nursery to Year 6. I was even lucky enough to work with the same children at different times in their school career – once in the Reception and then again in year 4. One particular aspect of working with these children stood out for me: the children in the Nursery and, to some extent the Reception, were generally busy, focused and independent. By the time they reached the latter years of their primary schooling, many of them were none of these things. Whilst teaching in upper primary classes there were many



occasions where I heard that familiar plaint “Miss, I’ve finished my work, what shall I do now?”- something I never heard in the Nursery or Reception. As a university tutor I have also watched the struggles that some undergraduates experience when making the transition to university learning. It seemed to me that far from helping learners to become independent, schooling may have the opposite effect. These experiences have instilled in me a belief in the importance of developing children’s agency within the schooling process in order to foster a sense of independence.

My interest in transition came out of my twin sons’ move from the Reception to Year 1. Having worked in the Nursery and Reception, I was aware that some children have difficulty adjusting to school life; having to cope with new routines, different expectations, and being overwhelmed by so many other children running around in the school playground, and the noise of the dining hall in particular. I have memories of walking in the school playground with a child attached to each finger, and of children not wanting to go to lunch because of the noise. I also remember having some concerns about particular children not being able to cope with school once they left the Reception because of their lack of school experience.

My own children went into Year 1 some years later after the introduction of the Foundation Stage. One morning, as we were walking to school about two weeks after the beginning of term, one of my sons turned to me and said “I don’t want to go to school any more.” “Why is that?” I asked him. “Well,” he said “I don’t mind doing literacy and I don’t mind numbers, but I ALWAYS have to do what the teacher tells me to do”. This dislike of school was not something that he got over quickly; it coloured his view of school right through Year 1 and beyond.

My own experiences as a school teacher happened before the introduction of the Foundation Stage and the Curriculum Guidance that went with it and is an indication that issues with the transition from Reception to Year 1 predates its introduction. This view was confirmed for me in a conversation with an experienced Year 1 teacher, who was of the opinion that the move from Reception to Year 1 had always been a big leap for children. However, what the introduction of the Foundation Stage did was to draw attention to the issue at a national level. As I was in the process of studying for an MA at that time, I chose to make the transition to Year 1 a focus of a small research project looking at practitioners' and parents' views of the transition to Year 1. This project established that the transition to Year 1 did have the potential to cause difficulties for some children and was of academic interest for several reasons that I shall explore fully in Chapter 1. Similar reports on behalf of Ofsted (2004) and the DfES/Surestart (Sanders et al. 2005) confirmed that there was a concern about the effect of the move from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

On the whole, these reports tended to focus principally on the difficulties associated with marrying two competing educational philosophies (Ellis 2002b): the lack of fit between the principles of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* (QCA 2000) (hereinafter the *CGFS*), and Key Stage 1 of the *National Curriculum* (QCA/DfEE 1999), which often led to abrupt changes in teaching styles that were perceived as difficult for young children to manage. These reports recommended that more needed to be done at Policy level to clarify the links between the *CGFS* and the *National Curriculum*, that there should be more training for teachers in the Reception and Year 1, and that the transition from Foundation Stage style teaching

to the more didactic teaching approaches encouraged by the content driven National Curriculum should be made more gradual. Thus the transition would be smoother and therefore less likely to cause problems for children.

What seemed to be of most concern to my son and to several of the children involved in the study by Sanders and her colleagues, (2005) however, was not necessarily the abruptness of the transition between the Reception and Year 1, but the loss of freedom that they experienced when they moved from the play-based structure of the Foundation Stage to the teacher-dominated structure of Year 1. Although children's views had been sought as a part of the investigations by Ofsted, and by Sanders and her colleagues, these projects tended to provide an overview rather than an in-depth appraisal of how the move from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 affects children's views about their schooling. Given that the early years of schooling have been identified as having a crucial role to play in forming children's attitudes and dispositions towards school and learning (Barrett 1989, Dowling 2000), I decided that what was needed was a project that was more closely focused on eliciting and understanding children's own perspectives over this important transition, hence the focus of my thesis.

## Overview

In Chapter 1 I provide a review of the literature that formed the theoretical framework for the study. The project itself moved backwards and forwards between an examination of theory and research and the field work and analysis of the data. As the project progressed it became clear that a relation to transitions theory alone was not sufficient to fully explore the children's perspectives. I therefore begin with

an overview of the transitions literature, describing and exploring the issues relevant to the study of transitions in the early years. I discuss issues of readiness, with regard to understandings of maturity and skills, and explore how these perspectives influence both theoretical and practical views of children. From there, I discuss transition in the light of theoretical understandings of ecological development and understandings of transition in relation to continuity and discontinuity. I go on to discuss the notion of border crossings and the role of adjustment and the development of resilience and 'transitions capital', culminating with exploration of the relationship between theories of transition and identity. Having discussed the literature on transition and starting school I move on to looking at the literature that deals with children's views of school. I look particularly at studies that have elicited children's views, but also at literature that deals with the development of learning dispositions in children and discuss the importance of context in understanding children's perspectives.

In Chapter 2 I describe the creation of the research design and its implementation. I undertook this research from a very specific methodological and ethical perspective that begins with an understanding of children's agency in developing their ideas about the world and their place in it and affirms their right to have those views and ideas taken into consideration both at a theoretical and a practical level. I begin with a discussion of the interpretivist underpinnings of the design and of the importance of understanding contextual factors in shaping people's views. From there I move on to discussing the ethical considerations that were at the heart of this research project from its inception to its conclusion. The second part of the chapter is

concerned with explaining the methods of data collection that were employed and discussing the theoretical and practical issues that arose whilst working with young children within the school setting. Part three details the methods that I used to process, analyse and interpret the data that I collected.

Chapter 3 is an examination of the national and local contexts within which the children made the transition from Reception to Year 1. I begin with a discussion of the different ways in which children and education can be constructed. From there I move onto a brief overview of how these different constructions have influenced English education policy. The final two parts of the chapter will look specifically at the views of children extant in the contexts of relevant National Curriculum documents and the school's curriculum policy and prospectus.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 I move on to examining the immediate contexts of the Reception and Year 1, including teachers' and parents' perspectives. The main focus of each chapter however, will be children's perspectives about the move from the Reception to Year 1. Chapter 4 focuses on perspectives about work with particular concern for children's feelings about work and their views on the changes that took place between the Reception and Year 1. I examine their feelings about the amount of time that they spent at work and about the differing ways that work was organised from one term to the next. In Chapter 5 I go on to look at views about play. I look at the children's thinking with regard to ideas about agency, learning agendas and the development of relationships. I then go on to look at the effect that the move to Year 1 had on the children's thinking about play, about the reduction in

time for play and shifting understandings of play from the learning into the behavioural contexts.

In Chapter 6 I explore the effects that the move from Reception to Year 1 had on the children's identities, examining three aspects of identity that would appear to have great salience both within the context of the transition and the children's own beliefs about what was important – these can be understood in terms of growing up, being good and being a learner. I will look at the interplay between these different aspects of identity and other wider cultural identities such as gender and I will examine the effect that these identities have on the way in which children managed their school life and also the way in which their attitudes towards school and learning may have been affected by the transition to Year 1.

In Chapter 7 I revisit the research questions, discussing the conclusions that I have come to as a result of this study and the implications that these may have for working with children. I consider some of the developments in education policy that have occurred since the research for this study was completed and examine the likely impact of these developments in the light of the research findings. This chapter is also concerned with evaluating the contribution that this study has made with regard to the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and the relationship of the findings to transitions theory.

Although the actual research took place between 2007 and 2008, this thesis is timely for several reasons. Firstly because it adds to the growing research that takes children's views as a central theme in understanding the field of education and secondly because the debates about curriculum policy are far from over; indeed,

since the Coalition Government took power in May 2010 there has been a review of early childhood education (Tickell 2011), which has yet to be implemented, and a review of the National Curriculum was launched in January of 2011 (education.gov.uk, last accessed 15/4/2011). Although there has been a great deal of comment about the need to make the links between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 clearer and the transition less abrupt (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al. 2005, IFF-Research 2003), more needs to be done to understand the nature of this transition and its affect on children's thinking.

# **Chapter 1: Review of Relevant Literature**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for the research by providing an overview of relevant literature. Part one will look at theoretical constructs of transition and its relevance to young children's lives in terms of movement between settings, cultures and identity, paying particular attention to transitions to and within schools. Theories of transition engage both psychological and sociological theory, are a complex interweaving of the two (Fabian 2007) and, like theories of learning, are based on differing views about children and childhood, which have been culturally and socially derived (James and Prout 1997a). Part 2 of this chapter will explore how different theories of children including: notions of readiness, maturation and skills; ideas about continuity and progression; and understandings of identity, inform understandings of transition and impact upon transition practices. Part 3 will concern itself with an examination of literature relating to children's views about their schooling including perspectives on autonomy.

## **Part 1: Transitions in the Early Years**

Transition is a word that indicates movement and change. When children move between settings, either from home to school or from school to work or university, or from one class to another they are said to experience transition. Transition, however, is more usefully described as a process rather than a single time delineated event (Margetts 2002, Peters 2000). Fabian and Dunlop, for example define transition as



[T]he process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another. ... It includes the length of time it takes to make such a change, spanning the time between any pre-entry visit(s) and settling-in, to when the child is more fully established as a member of the new setting.  
(2002: 3)

Similarly, Sanders et al. (2005) define transition as a process of adaptation (p vi). These definitions lead towards a view of transition as one that signifies change not only in a setting, which brings with it implications of destination, of moving from-to (Fortune-Wood 2002), but also of a change in context and identity - implying changes in expectations of behaviour and perspectives about self (Kohl 1998). There are some transitions that can be thought of as intrinsically motivated, as when a baby becomes a toddler who then becomes a child (Fortune-Wood 2002). These natural changes, both physical and mental, impact on both one's own sense of identity and the way in which one is perceived by others (Fabian 2007, Brooker 2008). Some transitions on the other hand are, as Fortune-Wood puts it, 'pre-ordained' (p135), and can be thought of as culturally imposed.

Starting school is an example of a cultural transition for a number of reasons. Firstly schooling is a cultural phenomenon. Schooling is both a contestable and contested field (Darling 1994). Learning and education can and do take place in many different contexts and amongst many different people. Children learn first from their parents within the home and from their siblings and peers (Froebel and Jarvis 1885). They learn about shopping from the experience of going shopping, and they learn about roads and transport from travelling. Schooling, on the other hand, is a formalised aspect of education and learning that, as I shall argue in Chapter 3, is organised in particular ways depending upon a culturally agreed understanding of what these constructs should entail (Bruner 1996, Bernstein 2000).

There is a wide variation in international school start ages and the values which underpin education that also distinguishes going to school as a cultural transition. In Finland, for example, children start school at the age of seven. In New Zealand, children begin school on their fifth birthday. In England children typically begin school in the year that they turn five. In many English schools, although not all, children begin at the start of the school year, which means that some children who begin school in England may be only just four, whilst others may be a day or so short of their fifth birthday (Sharp 1998). Moreover, a study by Ofsted (2003) cited evidence of the difference in values that underpin the education of six year olds in Scandinavian countries with those in England. In Scandinavia, there is an emphasis on co-operation and sharing, whilst in England the emphasis is much more about individual learning. This cultural aspect means that any discussion of schooling, although there may be enough similarities to provide some resonance, cannot be counted as universally applicable. The following discussion, therefore, is particularly focused upon the school system in England.

Children within the English school system undergo several culturally imposed transitions in their school careers. Compulsory education in England is comprised of 4 Key Stages; Key Stage 1 (6-7 year olds), Key Stage 2 (8-11 year olds) Key Stage 3, (12-14), and Key Stage 4 (15-16), all of which are subject to the *National Curriculum* (QCA 2000). However, the vast majority of children do not start school at the beginning of Key Stage 1, but in Reception classes, which, along with Nursery Classes and other pre-school institutions, were informed by the *CGFS* (QCA 2000) until 2008 when it was replaced with the *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* (DCSF 2007). Even

though compulsory schooling does not begin until the term after a child turns 5, the vast majority of children start school at some point in the Reception Year (see above) which is informed by early years' curriculum guidance, along with the *National Primary Framework for Literacy and Numeracy* (QCA 2007), which has highlighted the move from the Reception to Year 1 as a potentially problematic transition.

On the whole research into transition has tended to focus on the transfer to and between schools but there has also been some interest in transitions between Key Stages in education (Galton et al. 1999a). The transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum has therefore become a key focus for current research (IFF-Research 2003, Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al. 2005, White and Sharp 2007, Fisher 2009, 2010). Many of the concerns relating to the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 relate to differences in the ideological bases of the two curricula (Ellis 2002b), something that I will explore in depth in Chapter 3.

Culturally imposed, or extrinsic, transitions such as starting school can be problematic for some people and may have long term consequences in terms of their later school success (Margetts 2002, Brooker 2008). Children who do not have an easy start to school have been identified as being in danger of having continuing difficulties as they progress through the school (Dixon 1989, Galton et al. 1999a, Yeboah 2002). A review of relevant literature written in English over the last 13 years has identified a number of different factors that may impact on children's successful entry to school. These factors, as with concepts of schooling, are themselves contested and provide different models on which to base research into transition.

The following discussion will provide a critical evaluation of the theoretical constructs surrounding transition in the early years over the last ten years.

## **Part 2: How do competing theoretical perspectives inform the process of transition in the early years?**

It is important to understand the various ways in which transitions, and particularly early school transitions are understood because of their potential influence on transition programmes (Carlton and Winsler 1999, Perry and Dockett 2004). There is a question about the extent to which theoretical perspectives drive practice (Fang 1996), especially in the light of recent drives to define teaching as a technical practice rather than one that is underpinned by values (Moss and Petrie 2000). Despite this, Fang argues that ‘theories and beliefs make up an important part of teachers’ general knowledge through which teachers perceive, process, and act upon information in the classroom’ (p49). According to Perry and Dockett (2004) theoretical perspectives may bring about a difference in focus to transition programmes; either along social/organisational lines or a cognitive/skills orientation, although it is possible that these theories and beliefs may be implicitly held and unconsciously acted upon rather than being consciously examined. In the next sections I will explore some of the main theoretical constructs that have informed studies into transition and transition practices.

### **1.21 A readiness construction of transition- maturation/ skills**

Transition has often been associated with understandings of readiness. That this understanding is widely held can be heard in many conversations between parents of school age or nearly school age children; some parents believing that their

children are 'more than ready' to go to school, even though they will not be eligible to attend for several months, whereas others worry that their child, who is due to start school imminently, is not ready and that she will struggle when the time comes. These theories about transition are, unsurprisingly, heavily influenced by theories about learning and have led to diverse transition practices (Margetts 2002). There are both intrinsic and extrinsic conceptions of readiness that can be attributed to either biological maturation or to the development of certain social and academic skills.

For those who favour a maturational understanding of children (see chapter 3 part 1) readiness is a state that is intrinsic to the child and cannot be manipulated by adults. Translated into the transition from pre-school to school, or in the case of this study from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage one, it is often the youngest, or children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) who are judged as having the most difficulty with the move because they have not yet attained the requisite maturational development to be able to manage the increased adult oriented demands of the school curriculum (Carlton and Winsler 1999). A view of children as maturing through different stages of development has influenced many research projects into the transition from home or pre-school to school and has had an impact on school entry. For example it has led to a policy in some countries, such as the USA and Australia, of delaying school entry, or of retaining children who are considered too young or too immature to benefit from formal schooling in pre-school (Dockett and Perry 2002, Carlton and Winsler 1999, Rimm-Kaufmann et al. 2000).

The influence of maturational understandings of childhood can be detected in the later school start in countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland (Sharp 1998), and in the curriculum in Wales which extends the Foundation Stage until the age of 7 (DfCELLS 2008). Theories of maturational development have also been used as an argument for retaining what is known as 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice' in infant classes (i.e. up to the age of 7) (Early Years Curriculum Group 1998, Fisher 2010). The idea behind Developmentally Appropriate Practice derives from the view that there is a qualitative difference in children's cognitive function between different stages in their development. From this perspective younger children learn differently from older children and therefore teachers of younger children should use a pedagogy suited to their needs (Early Years Curriculum Group 1998), a view that I will explore in more detail in Chapter 3.

From this perspective younger children are described as having difficulties with the transition to school because of their relative immaturity. However, as Fisher (2010) argues persuasively, the move from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 in England has little association with theories of maturational development. She argues that whilst there may be some evidence for a change in cognitive function around the age of seven there is little evidence that the cognitive processes of children aged between five and six years are any different from each other.

Fisher sees this as an innate difficulty with the transition from Reception to Year 1 and argues that Reception class practices should be continued at least in Year 1 and possibly into Year 2 in order for children to benefit from a learning environment that is appropriate to their preferred means of learning. Similar calls have been made for

the school starting age in England to be raised (Sharp 1998, Alexander et al 2009), and for boys to start school a year later to compensate for taking more time to develop than girls (Biddulph 1998) (although this is very much a controversial and contested position).

There are several problems with this account of both learning and of transition, however. A developmental approach fails to account for reasons why children with EAL (English as an Additional Language) have also been identified as having difficulties (Brooker 2002), is based mainly upon adults' (and particularly teachers') perceptions of outward behaviours, and is called into question when looking at how children themselves perceive the transition (Sanders et al. 2005, Peters 2000).

A maturational approach to development has also been criticised for providing a view of children as passively developing through a system of stages, and does not take into consideration the differences in children's development across cultures or the different experiences that children have during their early formative years (Rogoff 2003, Mayall 2002). Wood and Bennett (1999) argue further that understandings of maturational development are limited to cognitive performance, and that the links between this and learning have not been satisfactorily established. Furthermore, while much of Piaget's work is considered of fundamental importance, his emphasis on ages and stages has been challenged by researchers who claim that it is not the cognitive aspects of his experiments that children were incapable of understanding, but that they were not able to comprehend fully what it was that he wanted them to do because of the unfamiliarity of the context (Donaldson 1987).

Rather than thinking of readiness as an inherent characteristic, a skills based view of readiness emphasises the extrinsic world of experience. This perspective on learning is often associated with the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1996). To some extent these theories can be seen as complementary to Piaget's understandings of learning in that they emphasise the child's role in constructing ideas about the world and the need for ideas to be embedded in concrete experiences. However, there is a much greater emphasis on the role of the adult in framing those ideas through interaction with the child and a much greater role for instruction rather than facilitation (Wood 1998). At the same time the emphasis is on being able to correctly ascertain a child's current understanding and aid their progress by providing instruction and experiences that are within reach of their understanding. Too great a gap between what is already known and what is being taught will not be successful.

Wood (1998) argues that Vygotsky's and Bruner's views lead to a change in the way that readiness is constructed. In order for children to be ready to learn they need to acquire a set of skills and understandings that will enable them to move on to the next stage of learning. Various skills have been identified as being important for school entry. These include self-help skills such as dressing and toileting and social skills such as the ability to listen, follow instructions, share and negotiate. Cognitive skills such as the ability to count, match letters of the alphabet and read and write one's own name have also been cited as important skills for school entry (Perry and Dockett 2004). This view has led, in some parts of the USA, to a more interventionist programme whereby pre-school children are given experiences to help them to prepare for school entry (Carlton and Winsler 1999).



A skills based view of readiness has been detected in some accounts of the transition between the Reception Class and Year 1, with some Year 1 teachers complaining that children entering their classes were unable to sit still, and found difficulty in undertaking teacher directed tasks independently (Ellis 2002a). Ellis's research, undertaken at a conference, indicated that many Year 1 teachers attributed the difficulties children were having directly to the implementation of the *CGFS* (2000), which has less emphasis on school skills and more on personal and social development (I will enter into a more comprehensive discussion of this debate in Part 3 of this chapter).

The emphasis on children being 'ready', either developmentally or with the right skills, for transition to school has been criticised in recent years. One of the main criticisms is that it assumes that children on school entry are a homogeneous group who should all come to school at a certain level of maturity and with a certain set of skills in place (Petriwskyj et al. 2005), thus decontextualizing the transition process. Furthermore, ascribing readiness for school to a certain set of knowledge and skills immediately introduces a cultural bias, because knowledge does not just pertain to academic knowledge, but understandings of how the education system works: Children whose parents are well versed (or indeed immersed) within the cultural practices of the school system are immediately placed at an advantage over others who are not (Brooker 2002). Brooker followed eight Anglo Saxon and eight Bangladeshi children through their Reception year and found that it was generally more difficult for the Bangladeshi children to access the school curriculum. Similarly, Dockett et al. (2006) found that the different relationships between children and

adults at home and school caused difficulties for aboriginal children. In America, Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) found that children from ethnic minority and/or low Socio-Economic Status (SES) backgrounds were more likely to be identified as having difficulty with starting school.

Evidence that factors such as gender, ethnicity and culture can have a major impact upon a child's successful entry into school (Dockett et al. 2006, Podmore et al. 2000, Rimm-Kaufmann et al. 2000) provides a challenge to both maturational and skills based understandings of school readiness. There have been calls for a shift in the way that school readiness is understood, particularly in America where the 'Every Child Ready for School' agenda (Shore 1998) has greatly influenced ideas about transition and has led to such practices as delaying entry to schools and the formation of transition classes (Carlton and Winsler 1999). Carlton and Winsler argue that these measures may in fact be counterproductive and it is schools that should be ready to take children as they are rather than trying to make them ready for school.

The cumulative effect of the findings from these research projects support Graue's (1992) conclusion that understandings of readiness are socially constructed rather than biologically determined. This is further borne out by a survey conducted by Dockett and Perry (2004), which found that concepts of readiness differed between parents and teachers; parents focussing more on academic skills, while teachers emphasised social and organizational skills. Petriwskyj et al. (2005) further note that holding on to understandings of readiness as being instrumental in successful transition demonstrates either the inflexibility of school systems or deeply held

beliefs about child development. Either way, constructs of readiness are not entirely satisfactory in fully explaining transition issues. However, given the pervasiveness of these constructs it is likely that they will colour understandings of transition in the field and must therefore be taken into consideration.

### **1.22: An ecological view of transition –continuity and change**

There have been several recent publications within the transition literature that trace the addition of socio-cultural theory to constructivist notions of child development (Edwards 2005, Petriwskyj et al. 2005, Seung-Lam and Pollard 2006). As with the views of Vygotsky and Bruner described above, socio-cultural theory inextricably ties children's development to their interaction with their environment and expert others, thus challenging the notion of the child developing as a young/lone scientist (Rogoff 2003, Vygotsky 1978). This construct provides a context for cultural as well as cognitive development, something that is missing from a purely constructivist perspective (Edwards 2005).

Margetts (2002) claims that ecological developmental theory provides a coherent and comprehensive means to view transition. Developed by Bronfenbrenner (1981), the basic premise is that children inhabit specific environments (what he terms the micro-systems), and it is the relationships in and between these environments (dubbed the meso-system), that have a direct influence on the child's development; greater concordance between meso-systems is linked with better outcomes for children as discordance,, or discontinuity between systems may compromise their development. Outside of the micro-system and meso-systems there is a further layer of influence (the exo-system) such as the adult world that parents inhabit and school

systems - what may be described as the wider societal environment - that has an indirect influence on children's worlds. Beyond this there is the macro-system, which encompasses the values and beliefs upheld by the cultural norms and laws of the society. Bronfenbrenner argues that whilst there will be strong similarities between the thinking of people who inhabit similar micro-systems within the same macro-environment, people from different macro-environments will have quite different understandings that influence their actions.

From the theoretical perspective of ecological development transition is understood as a movement between micro-systems; as in going from home to school, or when a micro-systems changes; a new child in the family, for example. In each case the child needs to adjust to new ways of being – as a school child, or as a big brother/sister. Although some children may find the adjustment problematic, it is argued that it leads to new ways of thinking, and therefore enhanced development/learning (Peters 2000, Brooker 2008). In some respects an ecological account offers greater scope for understanding transition than ideas about readiness as it allows for horizontal transitions (moving from one context to another over the course of everyday life) as well as vertical transitions (as in from one phase of education to another) (Johansson 2007), and it offers a rationale for why children who come from widely different macro-systems may have greater difficulty with moving between contexts.

Ecological development theory has influenced many studies into transition, and has led to thinking about transition less in terms of maturational or skills based readiness and more in terms of continuity and change (Sanders et al. 2005, Seung-Lam and

Pollard 2006, Fabian 2007, Dunlop 2007). From this perspective big differences in contexts or abrupt discontinuities have been identified as having a detrimental impact upon children's successful transition to school. Discontinuities between home and school or between key stage phases in the education system can be greater for some children than others, dependent upon the level of consistency between the settings (Pollard and Filer 1996) and children's previous experiences and expectations (Peters 2000). The greater numbers of children from ethnic minority and lower SES backgrounds identified above as having difficulties can be explained as a cultural discontinuity in behavioural expectations (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2000, Dockett et al. 2006). This cultural discontinuity is, according to Brooker (2002), particularly damaging as patterns of educational disadvantage tend to continue throughout a child's school career.

The view of abrupt discontinuities being problematic for children creates its own difficulties, however, particularly when applied to views of children starting school. There is evidence to suggest that it is not necessarily a problem with the children but with the expectations of the teachers that may be a cause of children's failure to thrive in educational institutions. Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2000) surveyed 3,595 kindergarten teachers in 1996 and found that there was a 'greater mismatch between teachers' expectations in areas with higher concentration of poverty and minority status' (p162). They suggest that the correlation between teacher expectations and children's performance they found in their research was, perhaps, more salient to these children's poor success rate in school than initial difficulties with transition.

The extent to which disjuncture in curriculum practices poses a problem for children is debatable. While studies such as the above cite it as a difficulty, Peters' (2000) research in New Zealand indicated that there is a much more complex relationship between changes in context and children's reactions. As a part of a wider research project Peters cited case studies of six children following their progress from pre-school to school. While some children found the change in curriculum problematic this was for a variety of reasons. Moreover one child welcomed the change as he had found his nursery experience unsatisfactory and unchallenging. Peters concluded that it was not necessarily discontinuity that was the problem but the level of support that was given to the children on entering school and children's own inclinations and experiences that were key factors in how children viewed the transition to school. Although a very small scale study, Peters' research highlights the importance of examining both context and children's perceptions when undertaking research into transition.

More recently, alongside notions of continuity and discontinuity, developments in understandings of children as co-constructors of meaning have brought a greater focus on how children come to make sense of and manage their own roles in transition (Griebel and Niesel 2002). There are three main concepts that underpin research in this area; strategic action, resilience and transitions capital. Strategic action presupposes that children are active in negotiating their roles within settings. Linked with Wood's ideas about coping strategies (Woods 1990), Pollard and Filer (1999) have fashioned a taxonomy of strategic actions that children employ in their

school careers. These strategies fall into four categories; conformity, anti-conformity, non-conformity and redefinition (p26).

These terms seem to have some resonance for understanding the way in which children act during transition and have been used by Seung-Lam, for example, (2009) to research how children manage the transition from home to kindergarten in Singapore. There has been a similar focus on the importance of resilience during the process of transition. Resilience has been described as 'a collection of qualities that support adaptation and the capacity for normal development under difficult circumstances' (Fabian and Dunlop 2007: p7). Resilient children are able to respond positively to changes that may be challenging, and develop positive strategic actions in order to cope with them. Following on from this, Dunlop (2007) has built on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to develop the concept of transitions capital whereby children build up a stock of strategies to help them manage transitions throughout their careers.

Understandings of continuity and discontinuity have added a different dimension to the study of transition and demonstrate the importance of taking into account both context and a child's own capacity to adapt. The literature on transition tends to foreground the need for adults to help children develop resilience, or to make the transition from early years education to school more gradual; to develop transition practices such as familiarisation visits, providing continuity of education practices, sharing information between settings and working in partnership with parents, (Smith 2002, Fabian and Dunlop 2007). All these practices would appear to have some measure of success in helping children to accustom themselves and to adapt to

different expectations, identities and environments. However, there have been some criticisms of this view for assuming that contexts are both static (Bronfenbrenner 1981) and unproblematic; Mayall, for example, contends that difficulties in schooling tend to be defined in terms of deficiencies within the child rather than any inherent flaws in the system; 'the school, as an institution for children, cannot be in question' (Mayall 2002, p3).

Notions of continuity and discontinuity have also provoked discussions as to the best way to help children manage the transition from one phase of education to another and has led to the implementation of strategies specifically designed to support children through the process of transition. Some examples of these are school and home visits to familiarise children with the environment and with the teachers, the sharing of information between settings, working in partnership with parents and providing a gradual induction into the school environment and educational practices (IFF-Research 2003, Fabian 2005, Sanders et al. 2005). The effectiveness of some of these practices is contested by different stakeholders in the transition process, however. Sharing of information with parents for example, was not seen as particularly important in a telephone survey by IFF Research (2003) on behalf of Sure Start, and nor was making the transition between education practices more gradual. It may well be that these findings are somewhat skewed because the sample of respondents included early childhood centres who had little experience of Year 1, and who may well have been very protective of their curriculum with regards to school curriculum. Other more comprehensive and focused studies have highlighted the importance of involving parents in the transition process, and of providing some



form of continuity of practice (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al. 2005, Clarke 2007). The effectiveness of these strategies with regards to children's own views about the transition to Year 1, however still need to be investigated more thoroughly.

### **1.23 Transition and identity**

The focus on transition in terms of continuity and discontinuity has prompted an interest in the relationship between transition and identity. Identity is itself a complex concept that is open to interpretation and debate (Lawler 2008). Identity can be thought of in two ways that are relevant to understandings of transition: social identity and personal identity (Cigman 2001, Chappell et al. 2003, Kowalski 2007, Merry 2007). Social identities relate to constructions of individuals that are based on ideas that are dominant within social contexts, and personal identities to characteristics such as reactions, abilities and traits that make people unique (Kowalski 2007). Personal identity can also refer to the way in which individuals come to understand themselves as a part of a social group (Lawler 2008). Identity can therefore be associated with ideas about belonging, a recurrent theme in both transitions and early childhood literature (Jackson and Warin 2000, Brooker 2008).

What is particularly pertinent to understandings of transition is the contention that rather than being a member of a single social group, people belong to several different groups some of which, such as gender, culture and social status, may be more strongly defined than others (Kowalski 2007). Jackson and Warin (2000) claim that a sense of belonging to a social group becomes especially salient during times of transition and that people display a tendency to seek out others who have shared characteristics during times of change, thus privileging social identity over more

personal traits. Their research highlights gender as an important aspect of identity during transition periods in schools. Other studies have highlighted the importance of cultural identity in transition. Podmore et al. (2000) for example, argue that children from Pacific Island cultures feel more comfortable if there are adults from the same community and familiar artefacts when they come to school. Similar findings have been reported from research into transition for children from aboriginal backgrounds in Australia (Dockett et al. 2006). This desire to belong to a social group may also account for the importance that has been placed on friendships as a significant factor in helping children to make good transitions to school (Demetriou et al. 2000, Ledger et al. 2000, Peters 2003).

Also significant is the way in which social groups and their characteristics vary from one context to another (Mayall 1994). In other words, how people are categorised and what are considered typical or acceptable forms of behaviour for particular groups in one context are not so in another. Transition points can therefore be thought of as junctures where there are changes of discourse in social identity. In her work on children starting Kindergarten in Singapore Seung-Lam (2009) conceptualises this variation as a form of cultural boundary; home and school serve different purposes and 'the gap between the contexts of home and kindergarten is apparent; children may be confronted with totally different cultural models' (p 126) and therefore different expectations of behaviour.

Although there may be a danger of conflating behaviour with identity, a feature of social identity is the way in which certain characteristics (or behaviours) are assigned to particular social groups through the dominant discourses that prevail within

society (Chappell et al. 2003). In terms of gender, for example, girls may be assigned one particular set of characteristics and boys another. Kowalski (2007) claims that it is the way in which adults emphasise these discourses, and separate people according to these groups that influence children's thinking; 'adult use of [social] categories appears to send a signal to children about their importance' and, moreover 'how children see themselves and others in relation to group membership...has significant implications for development.' (p50). In other words, how children interpret their membership of a particular group will influence the way in which they see themselves and their actions within that group.

The way in which characteristics are assigned to different social groups can be thought of as discourses, which are subject to power relations (Foucault and Gordon 1980, Lawler 2008). According to Foucault, power exists not as a thing in itself but as a network or relationship between individuals that, although it is not shared equally between individuals, can be negotiated or challenged. Foucault focuses particularly upon the relationship between power and knowledge; those who 'know best' have a better claim to authority. This is significant to ideas about transition because it is those who already inhabit the space that is being moved to who are able to shape the characteristics that are expected of that particular group.

In the literature on transition, some identity discourses such as gender, ethnicity and SES tend to dominate (Podmore et al. 2000, Rimm-Kaufmann et al. 2000, Dockett et al. 2006) echoing Kowalski's contention that 'not all [social] groups are the same. Some are relatively trivial with respect to self-definition whereas others have greater social and psychological import' (2007: 49). However, it would appear that in the

transition to school other aspects of identity such as ideas about growing up (Merry 2007, White and Sharp 2007), about rules (Dockett and Perry 2002, Einarsdottir 2002) and about learning (Bartholomew and Gustaffson 1987) have a significant effect on children's perceptions about school. Lawler (2008) argues that there is always a relational aspect to identity- that one comes to understand oneself as a boy or girl for example in relation to other boys and girls, or as a school child in relation to other school children. Kowalski argues further that this process 'is highly influenced by the social context children find themselves in' (p 57). The emphasis that is placed by adults on different social groups and the characteristics that they assign to those groups would therefore appear to have an impact on both children's self-perceptions and the way that they think about other people.

What is argued, therefore, is that identity is not fixed but is contingent on the social spheres within which an individual acts (Pollard and Filer 1999, Hughes 2004, Kowalski 2007, Merry 2007, Lawler 2008). Transitions are linked with the way in which understandings of identity – how a person is constructed socially - changes from one context to another.

During the transition to school it would appear that, in addition to wider social groups, there are more locally situated social groupings and identity discourses that are emphasised (Merry 2007). Schools are places where interpretations of maturity, intelligence, independence and socialisation are both explicitly and implicitly expounded and power relations brought to bear in order that children (or pupils as they become in this context) are inculcated into the ways of the dominant culture (Willes 1983, Brooker 2002, Ellis 2002b). The onus, therefore, is on children to adapt

to the culture of the classroom, and for teachers to facilitate that adaptation, rather than the culture of the classroom to adapt to children. Merry (2007) suggests that children who adapt successfully have enhanced feelings of self-worth, and are likely to make good transitions. The implication is, therefore, that children who do not adapt successfully to their new role, for whatever reason, may experience a loss of self-esteem and change the way in which they perceive themselves as learners that could, unless addressed, foster negative learning dispositions and damage their potential to do well at school.

There is a danger, when looking at the way in which social identities are produced, to ignore the role that individuals have in interpreting these identities. From a social constructionist perspective, children are not born with a ready-made identity, neither is there a gradual unfolding of a developmental process, nor are social identities imposed upon them. Instead, children are thought to actively construct their identities through understandings derived from both their own experiences and the narratives of others (Willes 1983, Barrett 1989, Griebel and Niesel 2002) and the roles that people adopt are negotiated through social interaction (Giddens 1984, Pollard and Filer 1999, Kowalski 2007). Therefore, although it is the adults who initiate the learning environment in schools, it is children who interpret that environment; 'thinking, observing and listening and making meaning in relation both to themselves and their experiences' (Barrett 1989: p7), which highlights the importance of focusing on children's perspectives during transition.

The way in which children interpret the social identities that are constructed for them would appear to have an important part to play in successful adaptation to

school. However, the internalisation of these discourses does not necessarily mean that the individual will conform to these new understandings of identity. As I have explained in the previous section, research into the transition of children from minority cultural backgrounds highlights the potential of transition from one context to another to create conflict between discourses that have already been internalised through participation in different cultural contexts and lead to poor outcomes in terms of well-being and participation. (Podmore et al. 2000, Brooker 2002, Dockett et al. 2006). The different educational cultures of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 also provide a platform whereby socially produced ideas about learner and pupil identity in particular may well have an effect on children's successful transition between these two cultures.

There has been some limited research into the impact of starting school on learner and pupil identities. These studies highlight the physical and emotional effects of changes in the learning environment and the potential impact on children's self-esteem and the development of learning strategies (Barrett 1989, Bartholomew and Gustaffson 1997, Kohl 1998, Peters 2000). However, although studies into the transition between the Reception and Year 1 have found some areas for concern regarding conflict between children's thinking and the pedagogy they experience in Year 1, these areas had not been researched in much detail.

It is also possible to overstate the influence that social identity discourses have in shaping children's responses, which may lead to an overly deterministic understanding of context. Children's own learning goals and identity priorities may also need to be taken into account. Maddock's (2006) research, for instance, on

children's learning in non-school contexts revealed that children's learning priorities are not necessarily those which adults might ascribe to them. She argued that the children in her study were as much concerned with learning what it was to be themselves (boy/girl, alive/dead, good/bad etc.), as it was with the kinds of social and academic learning that are prioritised in schools.

### **1.24 The transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1**

Because the children making the transition from the Reception to Year 1 are already in school, the focus in the literature tends to be on the differences between the Foundation Stage Curriculum and the National Curriculum (Ellis 2001a). These changes can be described using all of the theoretical constructs that I have described above. Fisher (2010), for example, focuses on maturational development in her account of the transition from the Reception to Year 1, arguing that whilst the Foundation Stage curriculum takes children's developmental level into account, the National Curriculum ignores 'the fact that the way in which children learn in Key Stage 1 is developmentally very different from the way they learn in Key Stage 2' (p 4).

Notions of continuity and discontinuity have also proved influential in the study of the move from the Reception to Year 1. Two reports into the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al. 2005) identify abrupt changes in curriculum organisation and teaching style as having a potentially negative impact upon children's successful transition to Year 1. This change is understood to be the product of competing perspectives that underpin the pedagogies relating to Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (see Chapter 3, part 1) and

which have been identified as a particular issue for the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (Sanders et al 2005); A report by Ofsted into the transition, for example, found that there was not enough attention paid at national level to the mismatch between the two curriculum documents (Ofsted 2004).

Both of these reports call for the transition to be made more gradual, or for the links between the Reception and Year 1 to be made stronger, but there is no real questioning of the values that underpin either the *CGFS* or the *National Curriculum* (Sanders et al. 2005, Ofsted 2004). However, as I shall argue in chapter 3, the tensions do not just exist between the two stages in the education sector, but are present both within the *CGFS* itself (Ellis 2002b) and within Government Policy documents aimed at Primary Schools. Ellis describes the tension between differing expectations of children in the pre-school and school, arguing that pre-school children are perceived as individuals, who have brought a great deal of learning from home. In pre-school children have time to explore, to work in depth and become engrossed in activities (p118). By contrast;

Children in school must conform to school routines ...They learn to work and then to stop work at set times ... The child-in school is expected to conform not only to routines but also to the expectations ... 'getting it right' or at least not getting it wrong is a part of the school day.  
(p117)

Being a part of the school system means that Reception Classes are spaces where these tensions are particularly strong and teachers have to find ways of resolving the conflicting nature of the expectations of pre-school and school (Bennett et al. 1997, Adams et al, 2004), which makes it likely that issues of transition are not confined to the move from Reception to Year 1 but are present within both the Reception Year



and Year 1, which would mean that it would be important to explore these issues in depth and over time.

Whilst, as I shall explore in chapter 3, there are differences in the way in which the Foundation Stage curriculum (QCA 2000) and the National Curriculum (DfEE 1999,) are organised, there is a tendency to focus on the use- or lack of use- of play as a pedagogical tool. However, there is an uneasy relationship between play and pedagogy as what constitutes play/not play depends very much on one's point of view. As Wood (2010: 11-12) argues '[t]he field of play draws on many contrasting disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives... What play is, what play means and what play does for the players is conceptualised in different ways according to the particular lenses through which researchers view play.'

It seems to be generally agreed that play has certain characteristics which, although they may be shared by other pursuits, combine to distinguish an activity as play (Garvey 1991). The most pertinent of these characteristics to this discussion relate to motivation and purpose. For something to be understood as play it must be freely chosen by the player- the motivation is intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Similarly the purposes of play are intrinsic rather than extrinsic, it is undertaken for no other reason than the player wants to do it and there are no explicit outcomes expected from the play. Moyles (1989) argues that play is not something that can be identified as any particular activity but must be seen as a process based upon Bruner's suggestion that the principal characteristic of play '- whether of a child or an adult - is not its content, but its mode. Play is an approach to action not a form of activity' (cited in Moyles 1989:11). Play, therefore, is not something that is confined to early

childhood but may be engaged upon at any time in a person's life and any activity can be undertaken as play or not play depending on how it is approached.

Aspects of this definition become problematic when talking about play in schools, however. The lack of extrinsic goals, for example, is in direct opposition to some of the stated aims of education. One way round this is to think of there being a continuum between play and non-play (Wood 2010) so that an activity can be thought of as being either more or less play depending on the number of those characteristics that I have described are present. However, this is perhaps conflating the concept of play with being playful (Howard et al. 2002). Howard and her colleagues differentiate between play as a set of observable characteristics and being playful as a state of mind- somewhat more akin to Bruner's definition of play as an attitude or a process. The definition of play, therefore, is tied to understandings of autonomy and freedom of choice whereas varying degrees of playfulness may be identified across a range of activities, both play and non-play. However, as I shall argue in the next section, it is how children understand play and work in school, and how those understandings are affected by the transition from the Reception to Year 1 that is of interest in this study.

### **Part 3: Children's perspectives**

The increased focus on identity as a significant aspect of transition draws attention to the importance of gathering children's perspectives as they can often run counter to adult perceptions (Mayall 2002, Maddock 2006). There is evidence to suggest that identity is a major preoccupation for children during times of transition. As well as focussing on wider aspects of social identity such as gender (Jackson and Warin

2000) and culture (Podmore et al 2000, Brooker 2002, Dockett et al. 2006), research into children's perceptions of the transition from pre-school to school highlights children's concerns with ideas about learner identity (Bartholemew and Gustaffson 1997), growing up and getting bigger (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al. 2005, White and Sharp 2007) and what it means to be a pupil (Dockett and Perry 2002, Einarsdottir 2007). There has been some limited research about children's views of school, with regard to autonomy, identity and ideas about work and play, that are also relevant to the transition from Reception to Year 1. The next few sections, therefore, will be an exploration of literature concerning children's perspectives on transition and on school in general.

### **1.31 Children's views of school**

Several international studies have looked at children's perspectives on the transition to school and have emphasised the importance that children place on rules and friendships (Perry and Dockett 2004, Einarsdottir 2007). Margetts (2006) argues that the stress on rules may help children to monitor their own and other's behaviour and contribute to feelings of well-being, belonging and security. Similarly, friendships seem to be an important factor for children starting school, although there is some debate as to the importance of starting school with a friend as opposed to making friends quickly (Ledger et al. 2000, Peters 2003). Dockett and Perry (2001) also suggest that children have a tendency to focus on their feelings when starting school, something that is echoed by Lucey and Reay (2000) in their research on children starting secondary school. However, according to the limited literature examining children's views of the transition from the Reception to Year 1,

these concerns seem to be less relevant than they are at times when children are moving from one school to another rather than between classrooms (Sanders et al 2005).

The evidence from the literature suggests that children's perceptions of changes in their school experiences from the Reception to Year 1 tend to be couched in terms of work and play (Sanders et al 2005, White and Sharp 2007, Fisher 2009), and that the move to year 1 is particularly associated with having to do harder work. Sanders and her colleagues noted ambivalent attitudes towards hard work in Year 1, with some children saying that they enjoyed this experience. However, they do particularly note that liking of hard work tended to be associated with things children perceived they were good at, findings that are supported by Pollard et al (2000). The nature of these research projects however, did not provide much of an understanding of how this association may have affected children's thinking about school and their position in school, and therefore there was a need to investigate the children's views in more depth.

Furthermore, it is not clear from these reports just what is meant by the terms work and play, both of which are contested terms in the field of education (Moyle 1989, Bennett et al 1997, Howard 2002, Wood and Attfield 2005). There has been some research on how children understand terms such as play and work indicating that their perceptions may be somewhat different from those of adults. Robson (1993) and Wing (1995), for example found that children tended to talk about self-initiated activities as play and adult-initiated activities as work. More recently, Howard's research suggests that children's experiences are highly influential in their

understanding of the relationship between work, play and learning. For example, Howard (2010) suggests that children in primary schools where play is used 'as reward or recreation, rather than as a primary vehicle for learning' (p499), were more likely to differentiate between play and work in terms of self/teacher initiated activity, whereas children who attended nursery provision were more likely to think in terms of difficulty. Howard's findings also imply that children's views of learning and not learning are defined by teacher presence/absence and, furthermore that children in schools had a very weak association between play and learning. The change in emphasis from a play based to a teacher led curriculum in the transition from the Reception to Year 1 made this an ideal arena in which to study these ideas further.

It has also been suggested that the transitions to school and from the Reception to Year 1 are associated with ideas about growing up and getting bigger. However, there has been little work examining exactly what that means for children. Similarly, there is an association between the move to Year 1 and doing harder work (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al 2005), which, again, needed further clarification. Whilst many children would appear to enjoy being 'grown up' and the challenge of 'harder work', White and Sharp (2007), noted a disquieting change in some children's enjoyment of school when they moved into Year 1. White and Sharp argue that children's lack of enthusiasm for school appears to be linked to feelings of a loss of autonomy and restriction of movement, especially long periods of time sat on the carpet, which, although it may create an intimate atmosphere, leads to more direct control over

children's activities (Galton et al. 1999b). This was something that they drew attention to as needing further research.

A review of literature on children's views about school supports the idea that children place a high value on autonomy within the classroom. Studies by Burke and Grosvenor (2003), Flutter & Rudduck (2004), Pollard et al. (2000), and Galton et al. (1999b) all show that, when consulted, students of all ages prefer to be actively rather than passively involved in their education. It would seem that, from children's perspectives, who has control of the curriculum has the potential to affect pupil engagement and self-esteem, (Barrett 1989). For example, Pollard et al. (2000) claim that both high and low achieving children prefer to exercise autonomy, the former being demotivated by too much control, and the latter experiencing 'considerable anxiety and fear of their failure being exposed.' (p103). If this is the case, the role of autonomous learning in the classroom may well have consequences for the development of children's learning dispositions and attitudes towards schooling (Dixon 1989, Dweck 1999, Katz and Chard 2000, Carr and Claxton 2002). The change in curriculum between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 made the transition from Reception to Year 1 an ideal focus for researching the effects of changing pedagogy on children's views of school and the effect that this may have on their dispositions for learning.

### **1.32 The development of learner identities**

Strategies for managing school work can be understood in terms of learning dispositions or learner identities. Learning dispositions can be described as those behaviours and statements that reveal how a person thinks about him or her-self as

a learner, and may be either positive or negative (Katz and Chard 2000, Dowling 2000, Carr and Claxton 2002). Katz and Chard differentiate between feelings, which can affect behaviour in the short term, and dispositions, which are long term patterns of learning behaviour. Positive learning dispositions might include traits such as motivation, perseverance, and confidence, whereas negative dispositions might include apathy, insecurity, avoidance, dependence, and helplessness. Positive dispositions may be associated with good feelings about the self as learner (Cigman 2001) and are conducive to learning, whereas negative dispositions may stem from a lack of confidence and inhibit learning.

Dweck's (1999) research into the way in which children perceive themselves as learners is pertinent to the understanding of learning dispositions. Dweck's theories are based on the way in which people understand their own intelligence. Differentiating between an incremental and a fixed theory of intelligence, Dweck argues that people who have an incremental understanding of intelligence tend to believe that they are able to become more intelligent through practice and problem solving. In contrast, people who have a fixed theory of intelligence are more likely to think in terms of clever/not clever.

From this perspective, cleverness, or intelligence, is associated with being able to do something well, and not being able to do something indicates a lack of intelligence. Dweck argues that people who have a fixed understanding of intelligence are more vulnerable when they experience difficulty; that their self-esteem is bound up in these feelings of can and cannot do, and that they are more likely to avoid challenge because of feelings of discomfort associated with not being able to do something, or

with being publicly exposed as less intelligent. There is, therefore, a link between learning, emotion and identity, which may well be of particular interest during the transition from Reception to Year 1 because of the importance placed on developing positive dispositions for learning in the early years where, according to Dixon (1989), an emotional response to learning is established.

However, there is evidence to suggest that dispositions may not become fixed at an early age, but are a changeable element of learning careers (Bloomer and Hodgkinson 2000, Pollard 1999). Whilst Bloomer and Hodgkinson's research is based on adult learning careers, Pollard and Filer's research studied children's learning careers over the course of their primary schooling. The results of these studies suggest that dispositions may change depending on the learner's interest in what is being learned, the way in which it is taught, how confident the learner feels about their abilities, how the learner is judged on their efforts, and, importantly, other factors indirectly linked to learning, such as levels of stress. These results are further supported by Dweck, who argues that it is possible to change people's learner orientation depending on the organisation of the learning environment. The transition from Reception to Year 1 is an ideal arena to explore these notions further, because of the change in learning environment that takes place over this time.

### **The focus of this study**

The review of literature has revealed that children in previous studies may find certain aspects of the transition to Year 1, such as being seen as more grown up and doing harder work, appealing (White and Sharp, 2007). Other aspects, such as the



reduction in time for independent exploration, and long periods of inactivity while listening to the teacher are less so (Sanders et al. 2005) Transition literature, because it centres mostly on the child's ability to adapt to new environments, rather than the environments themselves, does not provide a systematic critique of the different environments between which children move. Whilst Sanders and her colleagues (2005) have provided some useful signposts for areas of study, as an overview their report inevitably does not go into the depth of focus which is needed to truly explore the issues that children have about the move from the Reception to Year 1. My study was designed to look in depth at the effect that the changes in context between the Reception and Year 1 affected children's perspectives about school.

The review of the literature has also highlighted the importance of understanding, from a social constructionist perspective, the interplay between the social identities that exist within the cultural spaces of classrooms, children's interpretations of those identities and children's own sense of self. It is not enough, therefore to simply provide an account of the children's perspectives, the contexts within which they make those transitions must also be thoroughly examined. The main focus of this research therefore was the way in which children's feelings about school and about themselves as actors within the school were affected by the move between the differing contexts of the Reception and Year 1. This chapter has provided the theoretical context that underpinned the study, and has identified areas that need further investigation or clarification. In the next chapter, I will give a more detailed account of the research questions that came out of the literature review and the design and methodology behind the study.

## Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

### Introduction

As stated in the introduction the purpose of this study was to provide further illumination on the questions *‘How does the school context change between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?’* and *‘In what ways are children’s perspectives affected by the transition from Reception to Year 1?’* The previous chapter set out to examine the issues surrounding transition. In it I argued that there were several ways of defining transitions, all of which were incomplete in some way or other, but that a focus on ideas about continuity and change and identity was most effective to examine and to provide insights into the interplay between the children’s perspectives and the influence of contextual factors. I also argued that children’s perspectives into the transition between the Reception Class and Year 1 had not been thoroughly researched from a theoretical perspective that included critical examination of context from the perspective of children’s developing identities, and that this study was intended to rectify that omission.

In Part 1 of this chapter I will explicate the methodological and ethical considerations that led to the design and implementation of the study. Firstly, I will explore the underlying philosophies and principles behind the study and the rationale for collecting data on children’s perspectives. In Part 2 I look at how the research questions were developed as a part of the research project. I will then go on in Part 3 to discuss in more detail the conduct of the research. I begin with an explanation of the ethical stance that informed this study from its conception and throughout its conduct (Silverman 2005, Mason 2002). From there I discuss the reasons why a

broadly ethnographic case study approach was considered appropriate for this enquiry based upon the nature of the enquiry and the research participants and go on to explain the strategies for data collection and the rationale for using them, alongside a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this approach, drawing upon both literature and my own experiences. In part 4 I provide some background details to the research site and the participants in the study, and in Part 5 I will describe the criteria that were used for the analysis of the data and the process of data analysis that was undertaken.

### **Part 1: Theoretical perspective**

There has been a great deal of debate surrounding the ontological and epistemological positions underpinning social research for many years. These debates, while helpful in exploring the issues, are of little value in providing a starting point for a research project. As Hammersley (1995: 2-3) points out, 'looking at social research methodology in terms of competing paradigms is ... unhelpful. It exaggerates the depth of empirical differences ... and the scale of the impact of these on the practice of research'. However, I support the view that it is essential for researchers be clear about their own understandings about the nature of reality and the way in which it can be known and the effect that this has on the research project (Bryman 2004, Mason 2002). This next section sets out the ontological and epistemological assumptions that were made, with a great deal of consideration, at the beginning of this study.

This study was designed from a social constructionist perspective, which, according to Crotty (1998), is an epistemological position deriving from sociology in which

contexts and the perceptions of those who inhabit them are interwoven. From this perspective children's agency is demonstrated in the way that they play an active part in constructing their own 'developmental story'. In other words they actively interpret and build understandings about the world through interaction with the world around them. Equally important, however, is the fact that the world that they interpret is also socially constructed and therefore other people's understandings and interpretations influence and delimit children's own developing understandings of the world or, as Greene and Hogan put it, 'Social and institutional contexts, patterns of behaviour and educational outcomes do not exist apart from wider structures' (2005:2). It is probably more accurate to describe this process therefore as co-construction rather than construction (Griebel and Niesel, 2002). Shilling (1992:72) also argues that there are certain 'rules' of behaviour inherent in adopting particular roles, which have been laid down over time and will influence the newcomer's perceptions. However, because these rules are not fixed, but are subject to interpretation through other cultural reference points, variations in the social construction of these roles create tensions between structure and agency and can impact either positively or negatively on identity (Day and Kington 2008). This means that a detailed examination of context is important to the overall understanding of children's perspectives (Graue and Walsh 1998, Greene and Hogan 2005, James and James 2004).

The idea that children are represented differently in policy documents and through interactions with others is based on a social constructionist principle. Because of the crossover between sociological and psychological theory in transitions literature

(Fabian 2007), I would like to make some differentiation between my understandings of social constructivism and social constructionism, although they are often used interchangeably and the distinction is not universally acknowledged. Social constructivism derives from the perspective of developmental psychology where the primary goal is the understanding of the individual and how they learn to function in society. Social constructionism, on the other hand, is more concerned with a sociological view, where the primary goal is that of understanding how society functions. Central to social constructivism is the way in which the individual builds theories about themselves and the way they live through interaction with their environment including the people in it (Rogoff 2003, Bronfenbrenner 1981). Central to theories of social constructionism, however, is the argument that ideas about the world in which we live are socially constructed and reconstructed; that is, they are based upon social interaction and discourse rather than solid facts (Hendrick 1997). What is claimed is that knowledge is subject to interpretation through the linguistic codes and systems of the culture and through social interaction (MacLure 2003, Willes 1983, Woods 1990). Viewing ideas as being socially constructed opens them up to interpretation and debate (James and Prout 1997a, Mayall 2002), and highlights the importance of looking at both how institutions conceptualise children and learning, and at how these conceptions are interpreted by the actors involved. Social constructionism would therefore seem to be a more appropriate label for the epistemological basis of this research.

One of the main challenges that I encountered in adopting this perspective was in reconciling the tension between the relative influences of structure and agency. As

Shilling (1992), notes '[p]robably the largest obstacle to the integration of macro and micro- perspectives ... is the dominant conceptions of *structure* and *agency* in educational research' (p70, original emphasis). Macro studies tend to privilege structure over agency, whereas studies of the individual tend to do the opposite. Shilling argues that Structuration theory, as devised by Giddens (1984) brings together structure and agency in a mutually dependant duality. Agency is embedded in structure and vice-versa.

This mutual dependence means that there is potential both for continuity and change. Continuity because people have an inbuilt desire for regularity, and change because people have the ability to change their actions if there is a need or a desire to do so. Thus while structures may guide people, as they provide a framework of familiarity on which to base their actions, they do not dictate them (Giddens 1984, Shilling 1992). Willmott (1999) contends that Giddens' theory places too much emphasis on agency and that people are not able to make free choices. However, this is countered by the argument that there are systems of power, often upheld in law, which also serve to maintain structures (James and James 2004). The individual may have the potential to act freely but the systems of power may serve to make it risky to act in ways contrary to the prevailing social structures. Agency is also delimited by the existing social structures that influence how individuals interpret their worlds (Shilling 1992). My study sought to take a social-constructionist approach to understanding the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 because of its potential to examine the context in depth and explore its influence on children's perceptions.

There are several issues that need to be considered when taking a social constructionist perspective, not least of which is how the findings of this study can be said to contribute towards a body of knowledge. There are many different ways of interpreting a field of study, and it must also be acknowledged that any interpretation is filtered through the understandings of the research participants and ultimately through the researcher him or herself, and therefore a certain amount of reflexivity and testing of rival theoretical constructs is necessary (Bourdieu 2003, Mason 2002). Moreover, understandings of truth and validity are compromised (Crotty, 2003). According to Crotty:

What constructionism drives home is that there is *no* one true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations, to be sure, and these stand over against interpretations that appear to serve no useful purpose. There are liberating forms of interpretation too; they contrast sharply with interpretations that prove oppressive. There are even interpretations that may be judged fulfilling and rewarding, in contradistinction to interpretations that impoverish human existence ... [but] true and valid interpretations, no.  
(p47-8 original emphasis)

While there may be no 'true' or 'valid' interpretations, small scale studies that look deeply into human experiences are of value because they open up avenues to understand how individuals interpret their experience based on the wider social structures that influence their lives (Silverman 2005). However, the findings from a single (especially small-scale) study cannot stand alone, but must be understood alongside similar research projects.

Taking this perspective, the current study sought to examine how children perceive the changes in curriculum context between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, and the impact these had upon their thinking about school and about themselves within the context of the school in order to provide further illumination on the

transition from the Reception to Year 1. Central to this endeavour was the need to foreground the perspectives of the child; to 'get inside the way each group of people see the world' (Hammersley, cited in Crotty, 1998:76). There was therefore a need for an in-depth investigation that would pay close attention at many levels to the children's thinking and make the context in which the children develop their understandings explicit (Grieg and Taylor 1999). Robson (2002) argues that in real world research it is the research question that drives the methodology rather than any particular philosophical concerns. This is, however, a somewhat simplistic argument. As Mason (2002) and Bryman (2004) assert, research questions are not neutral; the way in which a research question is phrased and the information that it seeks to uncover imply a certain theoretical perspective that needs to be thoroughly interrogated at the early stages of research design. In the next section I will discuss the development of the research design and the ethical principles that underpinned the research.

## **Part 2: The Development of research questions**

As I explained in the introduction, the initial questions for this thesis were necessarily broad because of my desire for the children's perspectives to lead the enquiry as much as was possible. The initial question: *'In what ways are children's perspectives on school affected by the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum?'* was the result of a careful review of the available literature and set the agenda for the research design as an ethnographic style case study as I shall explain further in the next sections. In order to refine the



question somewhat I devised a set of field questions aimed at eliciting their perspectives;

- What do children identify as important in the Reception?
- What do children identify as important in Year 1?
- How do children talk about school in Reception?
- How do children talk about school in Year 1?

Because of the importance that I have attached to context in shaping perspectives, a major feature of the study was a thorough examination of the contexts in which the children made the transition from the Reception to Year 1. From a social constructionist perspective actions are predicated on the beliefs that one holds about the nature of reality (Giddens 1984, James and Prout 1997, Crotty 2003, James and James 2004) and therefore it was important to examine views of education and of children as learners that existed in policy documents at both national and local level, and the influence that these views might have on the way in which the learning environments of the Reception and Year 1 were organised. The second question therefore referred to the contexts within which the children make the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key 1; *'How does the school context change between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?'* Again, this question was broken down into sub-questions to take account of the different layers of policy and practice development.

- How do national policy documents describe children in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1?
- How does the school interpret these policy documents in planning for children's learning in the Reception and Year 1?

Because of the central role that the teachers played in interpreting the policy documents and shaping the children's immediate learning environment it was important to gain an in-depth understanding of their views about children, learning and about the transition. I therefore developed another subset of questions aimed at finding out these points

- How do the teachers view their role as educators?
- How do the teachers view the children in the class as learners?
- How do the teachers view the process of the transition from the Reception to Year 1?

These were the questions that were developed at the beginning of the investigation to provide some guidance for myself as a novice researcher. Ultimately however, the purpose of the research was to look beyond these how and what questions and to try and gain a better understanding of why the children reacted to the transition in the ways that they did. Within interpretive research, there is a more fluid relationship between research questions and the research process itself. In other words, the act of research and the data that are generated influences the research questions (Mason, 2002) Preliminary analysis of the data that the children produced generated initial themes regarding children's ideas about play, work, learning and identity that were then refined as a part of the analytic process and followed up by

more focused investigation consistent with an ethnographic approach to enquiry (Emond 2005). The questions that arose from this process were

- How are children's perceptions of play, work and learning affected by the transition from the Reception to Year 1?
- How are children's identities affected by the transition from Reception to Year 1?

As the analysis of data progressed, it became apparent that it was not only children's perceptions of identity that were affected by the transition from the Reception to Year 1, but that children's perceptions of identity had an effect on the way in which the children experienced the transition to Year 1. This formed part of the exploration of the interplay between structure and agency that I have discussed in the previous section. I therefore also had to explore the question

- How do children's identities affect their experience of the transition from the Reception to Year 1?

Understanding the parents' perceptions was also important for the conduct of the research; whilst the focus of the study was children in school, it became clear during the study that whilst I had planned to talk to parents as a part of gaining insights into the children's perspectives, I also needed to understand their views about learning and about the school as well. I therefore developed another set of questions aimed at understanding parents' perceptions.

- How do the parents perceive their child's transition from the Reception to Year 1?

These areas for investigation were developed through an iterative relationship between my reading, the research process and the analysis of data and have been incorporated into the findings of the study.

### **Part 3: Research design**

In this section I will discuss the way in which the study was planned and conducted in order to be consistent with the epistemological perspective I have adopted. I will begin with the ethical issues that were considered both during the planning of the study and throughout its duration. As well as discussing matters relevant to social research in general, such as the need for informed consent, confidentiality and the right to withdraw, I will examine issues that require particularly careful consideration when researching with young children. These concerns were at the heart of the research process from the beginning; influencing the choice of a methodology, the way in which the study was conducted and the relationship that I tried to build with the children, which had to circumnavigate the usual relationships between children and adults in schools. From there I will look more specifically at the reasons for choosing a case study design for this research process.

#### **2.31 Ethical issues**

In taking children's perspectives as a focal point for research I adopted an ethical stance (Clark and Moss 2001, Mayall 2002), stemming from a belief that children may not only have an opinion which is different from adults but an opinion that is worthy of being acknowledged and valued. (Clark et al. 2005). It is only relatively recently that children, and especially young children, have been acknowledged as both being able to make a positive contribution and having the right to have their

views taken into consideration in matters that concern them. Clark and her colleagues claim that the dominance of developmental perspectives in early childhood have tended to

produce an image of young children that is not conducive to listening: as a becoming, at the beginning of a process of linear progression from the incompleteness of infancy to the maturation of adulthood with the value (and feasibility) of listening presumed to increase commensurately.  
(p 5)

However, the change in emphasis from viewing children as social actors to social agents; as co-constructors of their worlds, with the ability to shape and not just be shaped by circumstances (James and James 2004:25), means that research into children's lives must, ethically speaking, involve eliciting their views. Doing so implies a 'respect for each child as a unique and valued experiencer of his or her world' (Greene & Hill 2005:3).

At the same time there were some dangers involved in taking children's perspectives as a starting point. Clark and her colleagues point out that as researchers we may not take into account the unequal power relations that exist between adults and children, particularly within social institutions such as schools. Listening to children could merely serve to maintain the status quo, constituting children as autonomous, flexible and problem solving individuals for 'whom self-realisation is the highest value' and effectively rendering children more governable by making their innermost feelings known (Clark et al 2002:9-11). It is also possible to ignore the interpretive nature of listening and to claim to give authentic voice to children without acknowledging the influence of both contextual factors and one's own perspectives (Clark et al. 2002). Whilst I did not consider these issues to be a barrier to doing

research with children, I had to make sure that I accounted for them at each stage of the investigation.

One of the first steps that I had to negotiate in embarking upon the field work was gaining entry to the school site. Participatory social research is not controlled entirely by the researcher. While researchers are responsible for the planning and implementation of the research, there are limits set by those who are willing to participate. In the case of research with children in schools there are several gatekeepers who must be willing to give their permission for the study to take place even before one begins to develop a relationship with the participants. Masson (2000: 36) argues that '[r]esearchers should expect gatekeepers to try to protect children from ill-conceived, valueless or potentially damaging research'. Following ethical and research board approval, I approached head teachers and early years' coordinators in schools, providing them with a broad explanation of the research focus and the methods that I was to employ to gather the data. As it was towards the end of the school year many of the schools that I approached either stated that they were too busy to get involved in a project at that time, or they did not respond to me at all.

One school (Winterbourne), with whom I had had experience, expressed an interest in allowing me to conduct the research in one of the Reception classes and in the subsequent Year 1. Although Walford (2001: 151) criticises the tendency for some researchers to 'settle for research sites to which they can easily gain convenient and ready access rather than thinking through the implications of particular choices', time constraints, and the trend toward more limited access to schools as research

sites (Troman 1996), meant that access to a school where I was known, where I would be more easily accepted (Emond 2005), and where I had a head start in the negotiation of a research role was important to the successful beginning of the study. Following this initial consent from the school staff, letters were sent out to parents to ask for permission for me to ask their child if they were willing to take part in the study, and also to state their willingness to undertake a short interview themselves (see appendix A).

Once access had been gained to the school, I was allowed to come into school as a helper until such time as I could get permission from the parents to approach the children. Letters were sent out to all the parents of children in the class explaining the purpose of the research and asking them if they would be willing for their children to take part in the research (see appendix A). In the meantime I used the time to start developing relationships with the children and to get an overall impression of the way in which that particular Reception class worked at that time.

There is some debate in the literature as to whether it is acceptable to attain permission by default, that is whether it is acceptable to take silence as consent, or whether explicit permission should be given by parents (Masson, 2000). Masson argues that there is a protectionist attitude towards children which, while it may help them, may also contribute to their marginalisation by silencing voices that want to be heard. However, opting in is considered to be more ethically sound (Alderson and Morrow 2004) and both the school's policy, and my own, given the age of the children involved, was for the parents to give active consent to their child's participation.

There is, however, a tension between a parents' right to protect a child and the child's desire to participate. This was something of a dilemma for me, because the use of cameras was very popular, and there were several children who were keen to take part, but could not, because their parents had not returned the permission form. I received 13 permission slips in the first instance. One child, Poppy, was very keen to participate. When she asked me why she couldn't, I explained to her that I couldn't talk to her unless I had permission from her parents. The next day, a hand written consent came back with her!

Once consent had been gained from the parents I approached the children and asked them if they would be willing to help me. Written consent was not sought from the children, but was a process of continual negotiation throughout the research process. Children in schools are in a particularly powerless position when faced with adult wishes (Mayall 2002) and I was therefore very conscious that I should make sure that they were genuinely willing to take part. At each stage I reminded the children of the reasons why I was doing the research in such a way that they could understand and asked the children involved if they were happy to come and talk to me and gather the data with me, explaining that they did not have to if they did not want to. Although the majority of the children agreed there were times when they were involved in activities and showed hesitance, in which case I told them that we could do it another time if they wished, which they did on occasions. This also gave one of the children (David), who seemed to be less confident with me, and who was identified by the teacher (Ms Arthur) as being quite shy, an opportunity to get used to me and to take his time in participating.



Gaining consent for observations was somewhat problematic. Although the children knew from the initial consultations that I was going to be watching what they were doing at times, I tried to be somewhat discreet as I did not want the awareness of being watched to affect what they did (The Hawthorne Effect, Robson 2002). The children did not take long to get used to my presence as an observer, and although there were times when children being observed did become aware that I was watching them, for the most part this did not seem to present a problem to them. However, there were occasions when I realised that a child seemed uncomfortable with me watching. Because of the power differential between adults and children, it is important to pay attention to their demeanour as much as it is to what they say (Clark et al. 2005) and so I terminated the observation and resumed it at another time when I felt that the child was more comfortable. There were also occasions during the more formal conversations where the children did not tell me outright that they did not want to talk to me, but where their body language or their replies indicated that they might be uncomfortable or unwilling for some reason, in which case I asked them whether they wanted to stop. None of the children elected to stop, but that may have been because either the nature of the power relations between adults and children in school, or that they did not want to go back into the classroom, as at least two of the children indicated that they preferred talking to me than doing 'work'. As with the observations, had I sensed continued feelings of discomfort from the children then I would have brought the conversation to an end.

As a part of the process of gaining consent the participants were told that steps would be taken to ensure they would not be identified. Although it would be naive

to assume that absolute anonymity is guaranteed, several steps have been taken to prevent the participants' responses from being identified with that person. In order to make sure that the information that I collected remains confidential, and that the respondents are not identified, the name of the school, the names of all the participants in the study and their school friends have been changed. The photographs that the children took have been used for analytic purposes only, and are not available for publication, and the location of the school, apart from a general description, has not been revealed.

Issues of power are of particular concern when researching with young children. Children, and particularly children in schools, are held to have little power over their own actions, and are subject to particular practices, which privilege adult perceptions over their own (Mayall 2002). In attempting to redress the power imbalance I tried to take a role that, while it was not that of a child, was also not that of an adult in charge (Emond 2005, Graue and Walsh 1998). Mandell (1988) identified three ways in which researchers can interact with children; as an objective, non-participant observer, in a friendly, non-authoritative, marginal role in the setting and what she describes as a 'least adult' role. The least adult role involves an adult participating with children in their day to day activities, minimising the differences between adult and child and assuming 'an active observational role, following the children, doing whatever they were doing and, when invited, interacting with them as an older playmate might' (p438).

A least adult role, however, involves a great deal of negotiation and bargaining between the researcher and the children as it is one that is unfamiliar to children

and other adults (Mandell 1988) and I had very limited time in the Reception in order to negotiate this role and collect data with the children. Moreover I found that this role was not really compatible with the Mosaic Approach (see section 2.35), which required a much more active research relationship between myself and the children and therefore I had to try and find a role that allowed me to approach children to take part in the research process yet diminished my authority as an adult. Although this was sometimes compromised by the teacher asking me to take on a teaching/management role and by my own difficulties in relinquishing the role of teacher, to which I discovered I was most attached, I was partially successful in negotiating a marginal role in the classroom (Emond 2005). This was evident in the way that the children challenged my prerogative to tell them what to do when I was asked to take on teaching activities, something they never did with the teacher or other members of staff. On one such occasion, when I had been asked to take a group of children out into the corridor to do some work with them, I found it difficult to do what I had been asked to do because I was being continually challenged by a couple of the children. It was not until I invoked the power of the teacher (by threatening to send a child back into the classroom) that I was able to do what I had been asked to do. Although I was concerned that this kind of participation in classroom activities might compromise the research data that I was getting, this participatory role did provide valuable insights into the children's thinking about teachers, rules and 'getting into trouble', which I may not have access to under other circumstances.

Another aspect of the research process that was also taken into consideration was the power that the researcher has over the interpretation of data. In other words, although children may be actively involved in collecting data for the research, it is most often the adult researcher who sets the agenda for the research and has the final say in the interpretation of the data (Kellett, 2005). Because I was in charge of the process of analysis the children's perspectives have inevitably been filtered through my own. In some respects, this is unavoidable; the researcher needs to gather data that is going to suit their purposes, or the project will fail. However, to try and ameliorate this effect I was careful to take the data back to the participants so that they could either confirm or contest the interpretations that I had given. With the children I did this by making a booklet with them using the photographs that they had taken as a part of the research process. They chose the photographs that were to go into the booklets and then I used some of the interview material to write captions underneath the photographs. The children were then shown the booklets and told that if they wanted to they could make changes, which some of them chose to do.

### **2.32 The choice of a case study**

A case is a single instance of a phenomenon, either a single person, or a group of people or an institution (Gillham 2000, Yin 2003). A case study examines that particular phenomenon in depth in order to gain a better understanding of issues relating to it. Gillham (2000) describes a case as being 'embedded in the real world' and 'merged within its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw' and a

case study as an investigation of a particular case, or cases, in order to 'answer specific research questions'(p1). Case studies are described by Yin as

appropriate when investigators either desire or are forced by circumstances (a) to define research topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) to cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and (c) to rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence.  
(2003: xi)

My choice of a case study was motivated by a concern for gaining children's perspectives within context and over time; the context being both the Reception and Year 1.

Winterbourne school was the site for this case study, where I followed a class of school children undertaking the transition from the Reception to Year 1. Whilst the children stayed the same there were two different classes and three teachers, which meant that they experienced three different classroom contexts. Rather than being subjects of case study research the children themselves were participants; helping to gather data aimed at understanding how the shifting pedagogies and relationships they experienced within those contexts shaped their ideas and feelings about school.

While it is impossible to generalise from the study of one institution, and claim that the findings from a single or even a multiple case study are representative of all similar institutions or individuals, Yin argues that it is possible to use analytical generalisation, 'in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical result of the case study' (2003: 32-3). Given the complexity of the factors relating to the transition from the Foundation Stage to Year 1 and the importance of gathering contextual data as well as the perceptions of the children, and a need to gather data from the same participants over an extended

period of time, a case study was the most useful approach for me to collect multiple and longitudinal data sets. In choosing a case study I was also governed by both practical and theoretical considerations. One of the main concerns that I had when designing the study was that the data the children provided should be the starting point of the investigation. The kind of methods that are useful with very young children, who have little experience of research and who have particular expectations of adult questioning in school, are quite time consuming and a case study allowed for the amount of time that I felt was needed in order to conduct a thorough study. The ethical considerations discussed earlier also influenced the choice of a case study (see section 2.21). I chose a case study as being best suited to developing a relationship with the participants which might help to overcome some of the power differential between myself and the children, and would give less confident children, who might ordinarily shy away from strangers, an opening to take part in the study if they wanted to. That this was an important consideration was reinforced by the way in which even the shyest and most introverted of the children become more open and relaxed (and cheeky) with me as the study progressed.

As I mentioned earlier, understanding the context in which the children formed their perceptions was also important to the success of the project. Within the framework of the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 there are fundamental differences in the pedagogical understandings that inform these contexts at policy level. There are also differences in teacher's pedagogical understandings that influence the way in which they plan activities and interact with children both on a personal and professional level. Whilst the choice of a case study

did limit the extent to which links could be made with the wider context of the transition, it also meant that I was able to look really closely at the changes in this particular context in order to evaluate its impact on the children's thinking.

### **2.33 Choosing a broadly ethnographic approach**

Enquiry in classrooms lends itself to an ethnographic style research because of the need to understand the subjectively structured context, which possesses particular meanings for its inhabitants Cohen et al. (2000). Ethnography has been described as a generic term for a set of research tools which places emphasis on uncovering participants' understandings of their social and symbolic world (Emond 2005:124). According to Van Maanen (cited in Miles and Huberman 1994:8) 'the prime analytic task is to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular research settings come to understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their day to day situation.' While it may not be possible to enter fully into the world of the child (Graue and Walsh 1998), an ethnographic approach allows for time to be spent in the setting, not just to interview and observe, but also to participate in the classroom routines and rituals, which may give further insights into the setting. Miles and Huberman (1994) also argue that it can be used in conjunction with more structured forms of data collection such as interviews and structured observations as was the case in this project.

More prosaically, one of the main advantages of ethnographic research is its flexibility. This flexibility enables a fluid structure that supports an interactive process between previous theory and the data that are produced from an inquiry (Goodwin and Goodwin 1996, Bryman 2004). It also allows for a process of refining

the research problem and the questions in response to the data collected from the participants, thus giving it a particularly reflexive quality (Miles and Huberman 1994). This flexibility also enabled me to adapt and develop the questions that I put to the research participants, to negotiate meanings, and to take account of any misunderstandings that arose. This was particularly useful when working with the children, whose use of language was often quite different from my own as this example illustrates:

SH: Will, can I ask you what do you think is good about being at school?  
Will: Not running down the corridor.  
SH: No, no what do you like about being at school?  
Will: You said what is good  
SH: I know, but what I mean is; what do you like about being at school?  
Will: Um, I like counting ... and I like playing with the sand...  
(From conversation with Will, Reception 2007).

This excerpt shows just how easy it is for children to misinterpret adult's intentions, even at a simple level (Donaldson 1987). The flexibility of an ethnographic approach was chosen to counter such potential problems.

Ethnographic research allows for rich, contextualised insights into the world of human experience (Mason 2002). As Miles and Huberman put it: '[t]hey are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable contexts' (1994:1). In the case of working with young children I considered this to be particularly important. Notwithstanding the statements made earlier (see section 2.1) regarding children's agency in making sense of the world around them, it must be acknowledged that, with regard to interaction with adults, and especially adults in schools, this is a fairly limited agency (Mayall 2002). Spending time in the setting, watching and talking to the participants, gave me the opportunity to examine the importance of context in delimiting the meanings that the participants could give to



a certain situation, and the way in which the context itself was subject to multiple influences and therefore interpretations, which was revealed in the differences between the subjective experiences of the participants.

### **2.34 A longitudinal study**

Ethnography is traditionally linked with long periods of time immersed 'in the field'. This is based upon the anthropological tradition from which ethnographic methods are derived. However, according to Troman and Jeffrey (2004: 543), it is difficult to identify an ideal length of time that should be spent in the field, as different research projects will need different approaches to the length of time spent in the field. Time was a significant factor in this study, as the intention was to examine how children's perceptions of school changed over the transition from the Reception to Year 1. With this in mind, the main body of fieldwork was conducted over a period of 10 months, from the beginning of July 2007 until May 2008. In line with Troman and Jeffrey's (p.342) recurrent time mode, this case study sought 'to research the effects of change on an institution, group or set of individuals', and 'every relevant observational detail' was recorded, in order to provide detailed accounts that could be used to compare with each other.

Intensive research took place over three particular time periods – in term three of the Reception, and then in terms one and two of Year 1, with a brief follow up visit in term three of Year 1 (see fieldwork timetable in Appendix E). In each time period the research in the field consisted of time spent in the classroom observing and participating in the classroom culture in various guises, and also of intense periods of data generation with the children. It would be more accurate, however to describe

this process as 'broadly ethnographic' as opposed to a classic ethnography, as the time spent in the field was limited, and because it was allied with other methods of data collections which were designed to foreground the children's changing perspectives over time (Yin 2003).

### **2.35 Selecting methods of data collection**

This next section will explore how I went about choosing the methods of data collection. In this study photographic evidence, drawings, interviews with children, teachers, and parents, observations, and field notes were used in order to build an understanding of the events that were occurring in the setting, and how this affected the children's perceptions of their school experience. As has been stated in the above section, a case study is not a method in itself, but a form of enquiry that needs several methods of data collection in order to be effective as relying on a single method of data collection, particularly with a small sample is unlikely to be able to provide enough information to be either useful or reliable (Woods 1990). Using both direct (interviews, photographs, drawings) and indirect (observations, field notes, documentary analysis) means of data collection meant that I could build a detailed and thorough account of the setting and the way in which the participants acted, and their motivations for so doing.

In line with the main focus of the study, which was the children's perspectives, the children were invited to participate in the generation of data. Methods of data collection were designed with careful consideration of the age and experience of the children involved. Researching children's perspectives has been considered problematic in the past, due to several factors that mediate against the reliability of

this kind of data. There is a power differential between researcher and participant, which is exacerbated when the researcher is an adult and the participant a child (Evans and Fuller, 1996, Clark and Moss, 2001, Graue and Walsh, 1998), and this plays a part not only in the analysis but also in the production of data. This is even further aggravated, when the research takes place in institutions such as schools where the children have very little room to negotiate their roles and relationships with adults (Mayall, 2002). Such a power differential may well have implications for the kinds of answers to questions that children may feel able to give. However, there have been several innovations in recent years in collaborative research with young children that attempts to ameliorate the difficulties involved in researching young children's perspectives. In developing the research tools for this study, I drew heavily on the work of Clark and Moss (2001), Einarsdottir, (2007) and Evans and Fuller, (1996) for appropriate methods of data collection.

The Mosaic Approach was developed by Clark and Moss (2001) as a means of collecting data with children in pre-school settings and is consistent with a case study, as it relies on employing a variety of methods of data collection to increase the reliability of the findings (Yin, 2003, Graue and Walsh, 1998). At the heart of this approach is an understanding that children are 'experts and agents in their own lives' (p5) and that they have particular strengths when it comes to communication that may be used to facilitate their participation in generating data. The Mosaic Approach combines a variety of methods, which are brought together in order to define and confirm themes. Whilst Clark and Moss developed a specific set of tools for a specific purpose, they argue that it is adaptable, and can be used across institutions in order

to gather participatory data, which is what I did; their approach was not adopted wholesale as I found that some of the techniques, such as making maps, were not very successful with these particular children, but developed and adapted techniques in the field to suit the purposes of the investigation, and the children's responses (Graue and Walsh, 1998).

The principle means of data collection were photographs, tours, conversations and observations. I brought a digital camera into the classroom and asked the children if they would be willing to show me around their school and take some photographs for me, indicating what they thought was important. Initially, I spent some time showing the children how the camera worked. Taking into consideration the fact that the children were both very young, and did not know me very well at that time, I asked the children if they wanted to come on their own, or with a friend. Some of the children chose to come in pairs, and a couple of children chose to come on their own. The photographs had a twofold purpose for data analysis. Schratz and Steiner-Loftner (1998) argue that photographs have their own cultural value, providing valuable insights into children's perspectives, and are not merely tools for mediation. Therefore although they were used as a basis for discussion, they were also used as data in their own right.

It was my intention at first, in keeping both with an ethnographic approach and with a concern for giving children power over the production of data, to give the children free rein with the cameras. This was not possible, however, because of an incident at the beginning of the data collection which meant that the children were only allowed to use the cameras under my supervision. Moreover, the continuing

tensions that I experienced with my identity as a researcher and as a teacher made it difficult for me to release control entirely to the children. It was clear at times that the children were taking photographs because they enjoyed doing so and because they were happy to have an activity that kept them from the class. At one point a couple of the boys took photographs of nearly everything in the classroom (and I mean nearly everything; between them they took nearly 100 photographs in the space of 20 minutes) an extract from my field notes at the time reveals the concerns that I had about making sure that I had usable data and therefore I negotiated more closely with the children about the photographs that they took.

After play time I tried to do an interview with Ollie and Danny, but I am not sure how successful it was. I got some things out of them, but not much. They were really jumpy, talking about farting and burping (at least Ollie was). I definitely felt that I was in the least adult role here, but I am not sure how effectively I can gather data in this way. Maybe I am expecting them to co-operate on my terms rather than theirs, which in a way negates the thinking that they have their own perspectives. It is just difficult to know what they are when all they talk about is farting and burping.

I really felt that it was getting out of hand, and so I told them that I was going to stop several times, however, every time that I said this they were quite anxious to continue. I think that this was possibly because this took them out of the classroom. When I gave them the camera to take photos they took photographs of everything in the classroom; close-ups of displays, corners of tables, chairs. In fact they must have taken over a hundred photos and didn't seem to be particularly interested in talking about them.

[Field notes 26.11.07]

Interviews were an important part of gathering data on the children's perspectives.

Interviewing is one of the most common forms of social research, seen as being one of the most effective ways of eliciting participants' perspectives, foregrounding the situational and contextual nature of people's actions (Mason, 2002, Yin, 2003).

Interviews can also be a way of examining taken for granted day to day practices, the underlying rationale behind which is not fully open to observation (Bryman, 2004).

However rather than structured or semi-structured interviews the children were invited to come and talk to me about the photographs that they had taken in a more

informal conversational style. I hoped by making the process more informal that the children would be more relaxed and less likely to give me standard answers. This may have been the case, but as the fieldwork continued and I got to know the children better, I realised that it was the relationship that they developed with me over time that enabled them to talk more freely rather than any particular approach.

I asked the children to tell me about the photographs and why they had chosen those particular things as being important. These conversations were recorded using a digital recorder. The great advantage of this method of interviewing was that it meant that the data generated by the children (through their photographs) was the focal point for the main interviews. However, as the study progressed, there were issues arising from the observational data such as their response to a play area being set up in the classroom, or how they felt about spending time sitting on the carpet, that I was keen to explore with the children, which I did through asking them specific questions and asking them to draw pictures for me.

According to Sanders et al (2005) drawings, like photographs serve a dual function. They are an important part of the data set in themselves, drawing being one of those means of communication with which many children (though by no means all) feel comfortable, and they are also useful in providing children with a familiar activity, which may put them at their ease and allow them to talk naturally. Drawing has a particular representational function with young children for whom writing is relatively difficult. Analysis of children's drawings, alongside a record of what they say about them, provides an insight into the way in which they understand their worlds and their relationships with the people in it (Anning and Ring 2004). The

drawings produced data which was in some respects quite different from, but complementary to, the data generated using the camera. However, it is also interesting to note, that as the children's confidence with the written word increased, many of the children chose to annotate their drawings, or photographs with writing as well.

The conversations with the children took place in a variety of situations. Some of the children were more comfortable in pairs, and some of them were more comfortable on their own. Talking to children in pairs can have an added function of generating a discussion which may serve to identify better questions (Graue and Walsh, 1998) or to provide corroboration. While this worked well in some instances, and the pairs (and in one instance a triad) picked up on each other's talk, there were also pairs that worked well for them in terms of having fun and joking with each other, but less so in terms of answering my research questions (see above). I found that interviewing children in larger groups meant that I spent more of my time in a managerial role rather than being in a position to ask questions and therefore attempted this only once.

While this was a source of frustration for me, it also allowed me to reflect on the relationships that the children developed both between themselves and with adults in the school. One of the things that the teachers (all three of them) impressed upon me was their perception of the class as a whole being a really good class (good to teach). This was largely due to the fact that the children were generally very eager to be seen to conform to what they saw as the requirements of being a school child in school. That this was, to a certain extent, a role that they assumed is evidenced by

the conflicting way in which they acted when they were with me (especially in a group, where they felt more comfortable) and during observations, where a couple of the children in particular would behave very differently depending upon whether they were under the eye of the teacher or not. This will be explored more fully in Chapter 6.

Observations were also an important part of the process. This is partly in accordance with the idea that people (including children) in interviews have a vested interest in portraying themselves in a particular light, and that what they say may or may not be commensurate with what they do (Robson 2002, Bryman 2004) and also to compile a more complete record of the children's activities in school. While this may seem to be at odds with the idea of listening to the child's voice, observations were a key part of my trying to tease apart how the children reacted in different circumstances and formed the basis of some of our conversations. In all I formally observed each child 5 times, once during Reception, twice in the first term of Year 1 and twice in the second or third term, utilising the target child technique (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004). Everything that the child did or said, and the interactions that they had with others (if audible) for thirty seconds every two minutes over a period of an hour was recorded in note form and then written up in detail. This is a form of non-participant observation that was particularly useful in looking at how the children reacted to certain phenomena (such as spending prolonged periods of time sitting on the carpet, or undertaking teacher directed activities). At the same time, I also kept informal, field note observations of the children, which again helped to focus my attention on situations which seemed to be of particular importance to the children.



During my time in the setting I kept a field diary, which reflected upon interactions with and between the children and adults in the setting, and on my emerging identity as a researcher. In ethnographic research, field notes, or a research diary, form a part of the data generated over the course of the research period (Woods, 1990). My field notes were an important source of information about how the study was progressing and any concerns that I had about the conduct of the research. There were times during the field work, where I would participate in various roles, in line with the idea that it is important for researchers to 'give back' something to the setting that has allowed the research to take place. The field diary was an opportunity to set down some of the concerns that I had about taking on these roles and also to reflect on the different relationships that came about by adopting different roles within the setting and how it might affect the data that I could gather. The field notes were also an opportunity to reflect on some of the informal conversations and interactions with the participants, which, as Graue and Walsh (1998) argue can be more effective than longer, more formal interviews.

### **2.36 Contextual data**

In addition to the field notes and observations that were written as a part of the data collection process further contextual data was generated through interviews with the class teachers and with parents (see Appendix B for interview schedule and specimen interview). In line with the qualitative approach taken in the rest of the study, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participants' reflections on a variety of issues. Semi-structured interviews are akin to a specifically focussed conversation (Robson, 2000); they allow the participants freedom to express their

opinions and perspectives using their own words, while at the same time allowing the researcher some control over the direction of the topic. In contrast to the data generated with the children, this information was designed to be contextual rather than central, and therefore a greater degree of researcher control over the subject area was needed.

The teachers were interviewed in available spaces in the school, with them selecting a site for the interview. Partly this was because the interviews were conducted on their territory and they had more control over the site than did I. It was also because there were limited times when the teachers made themselves available for interview, which meant mostly that they had to be squeezed in either during their time off from the classroom, or after school. They were asked their views on a series of topics including their own experience and thinking about teaching, and their use of policy documents from both school and government sources (See Appendix B for sample interview data). The parent interviews were conducted in relaxed settings (such as the parents' room in the school, the local coffee shop, or in their own homes), and they were asked their views on the children's feelings about school in the Reception and Year 1; how the children reacted to the move from Reception to Year 1, and how much information they had been given about the change in curriculum from the Foundation Stage to The National Curriculum. Pursuant to my feeling, developed during interviews with the children, that parental attitudes were a key part of children's thinking about school, I also asked them what they wanted for their children at school; what their attitude to school was.

Further contextual evidence was gathered through the collection of documentation, both within the school and –given the alleged highly prescriptive nature of education policy in England, and in response to the teacher interviews- of government policy documents. Given that the primary objective was to research children’s perspectives on school and not to make judgements on their educational attainment, no specific educational records were sought.

## **Part 4: The research site and research participants**

### **2.41 Locality and demographics**

Winterbourne School is a two form entry school in an outer London borough. The local area is dominated by owner occupied houses. House prices are well above the average for the borough, and for London in general. There are a large proportion of young families in the area, and entry to the school in the Reception is oversubscribed and drawn from a fairly small radius around the school (around a 5-10 minute walk). Thereafter there is quite a lot of movement in and out of the school, as families leave the area, and the catchment area widens. Whilst the children came from a wide range of cultural backgrounds there were few children who were in the early stages of learning English as an additional language (one in the class where the research took place). There were, however, several children who were bilingual, or who had bilingual parents. The Socio-Economic Status (SES) of the children’s families was also similar in that either one or both parents were employed in a professional capacity. Those parents who did not work were generally highly educated and had actively chosen to be at home with their children.

## **2.42 The teachers**

There were three teachers involved in the study; Ms Arthur was the children's class teacher in the Reception, Ms Hunt was their class teacher for the first term of Year 1 and then Ms Ives became their class teacher when Ms Hunt left the school to take up a post in an autistic unit. There are several similarities between all three of the class teachers, they were all female, fairly young and in their early careers having qualified as teachers by way of a PGCE. At the same time, there are some big differences. Ms Arthur's journey into teaching began with a qualification as a Nursery Nurse, whereas Ms Ives' journey was influenced by an interest in developmental psychology and Ms Hunt's by her mother's career as a secondary school teacher. As I shall explore in the subsequent chapters, these differences shaped the teachers' ideas about education and their interactions with the children.

## **2.43 The children**

Originally there were 12 children involved in the study, 7 boys and 5 girls. One child, Juliette, decided that she did not want to take part in Year 1 and so the data that she gave to me in the Reception was destroyed. As I explained above, the local demographic meant that the children came from similar backgrounds. However, I did not consider this to be either an advantage or a disadvantage as my focus was on how the children perceived themselves as members of social groups and the influence of transition on these perceptions, rather than trying to ascertain differences between social groups (see discussion in Chapter 1.23). I am also not trying to make generalisations from this data, but to explore in depth the interplay

between changes in context and the children's perceptions. In the chart on the following page I introduce the children and give some brief biographical data.

<b>name</b>	<b>birthday</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>parents</b>	<b>Siblings</b>
Belinda	Sep-15	F	Korean mother Australian Father	Nathan- 2yrs
Ollie	Oct-08	M	English Mother Australian Father	Felix- Twin
George	Oct-16	M	English parents	Emily -3 yrs Daniel -18 mths
Danny	Dec-11	M	English parents	None
Beth	Apr-07	F	English parents	Fred - 6 yrs
Poppy	May-15	F	English parents	Nicholas- 3 yrs
Lena	May-23	F	Polish parents	Magda- 2 yrs
David	May-31	M	English parents	Amelia, 9 yrs Michael, 7yrs
Kieran	Aug-05	M	English parents	Amy- 2 yrs
Tom	Aug-10	M	English parents	Harry- 3yrs Susan- 10mths
Will	Aug-15	M	English parents	Andrew-8yrs Hattie-3weeks

Table 2.1- biographical data of children involved in the study

## Part 5: Data analysis

### 2.51 Analytic approach

Given the interpretive and descriptive nature of the research a qualitative approach was chosen for analysis. The emphasis on eliciting children's perspectives meant that, as far as was possible, the data generated with the children should provide the initial basis of analysis, with theoretical explanations emerging from the data (Miles and Huberman 1994) rather than from a previous hypothesis. The review of the literature had, however, provided signposts that undoubtedly affected the way that

the data were interpreted. The data were analysed through an iterative process between the theoretical premises developed from the review of literature and the raw data. This was not a linear process, however, as anomalies in the data often revealed the need for reference to additional theoretical explanations, and on occasions to provide a more focussed approach to the data collection. Yin (2003) describes this as a process of 'thinking about rival explanations' and, while he argues that it is important to identify what he calls 'real life rivals' before the data collection begins, he also states that it is important to attend to those that become apparent during the investigation (p112-3). There is therefore a reflexive relationship between the review of literature, data collection and the data analysis (Mason, 2002, Bryman 2004), which became clear as the project progressed.

## **2.52 Data analysis**

Data analysis was applied to three types of data: observational data in the form of field notes, target child observations, and photographs that I took of the settings; communicative data in the form of: interviews with children, teachers and parents; conversations; photographs and drawings; and documentary data including teachers' planning and government documents. The observational data helped me to present an interpretation of the setting through reading and coding the field notes and the target child observations. The communicative data was used to provide the perspectives of those who participated in the study, and the documentary evidence was used to provide a contextual element to the analysis.

At the forefront of my mind in building the data analysis was a concern to begin with the data that the children produced for a combination of reasons. On the one hand,

the principal question related to children's perceptions of school in the Reception and in Year 1, and their responses were therefore of primary importance. At the same time, I was very conscious of the way in which my own experiences, both as a teacher and a parent had the potential to colour the way in which I 'read' the data. However, although, as I have explained in the introduction, personal bias must be taken into account, the analysis was subjected to a rigorous reflexive process which examined the data in the light of competing theoretical propositions (Yin 2003, Bourdieu 2003), which offers, if not an objective 'truth', then an informed theoretical interpretation.

### **2.53 The process of data analysis**

There were three different stages to the data analysis. The first stage involved the identification of themes across the data that had been gathered with the children, in a similar fashion to the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss 2001) (See Appendix C1 for sample mosaic). The conversations I had with the children were transcribed using HyperTranscribe™ software, and then the photographs, drawings, interviews and target child observation data were examined individually and then brought together and compared to find any common ground or any anomalies. A software analysis program, HyperResearch™, was used at this stage in order to facilitate the manipulation of large amounts of data. At the same time the data was also subjected to manual annotation so that I could get to know the data better. The initial analysis showed that although each child had a unique perspective, there were some themes that were common to all of the children. Using these, I developed several strands, which seemed to be consistent with the children's main preoccupations: work, play,

being good, being a learner and growing up. Once I had done this, I examined the children's responses over the three terms, to identify any changes in the children's thinking (see Appendix C for sample analyses of the children's data).

The second stage of analysis involved examining the children's perceptions in the light of contextual data. At this stage I brought together observations, field notes, interviews with teachers and parents, and policy and planning documents to provide a detailed context within which the children's perspectives were formed. The analysis of contextual data was conducted with close reference to Bernstein's (2000) model of pedagogical interaction that I shall describe more fully in Chapter 3. Bernstein argues that his model is an effective tool for analysis at every level of interaction from the wider policy context to the local day to day interactions between teachers and learners, particularly with regard to the way in which social identities are constructed, and therefore it seemed to be a useful tool for a close examination of the data as I will explain in some detail in the next chapter.

Although rich descriptions of qualitative data can be very useful and informative, it is also important to attempt some kind of explanatory analysis (Richards 2005). The third stage of analysis involved examining the descriptive data in order to provide theoretical explanations for the outcomes that were discerned in the previous stages. It was at this point that I found the literature on transition insufficient and returned to literature to try and find explanations for how the children's thinking about school, and about themselves was influenced by the changing contexts of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. From the initial strands I began to develop thematic categories based on the children's responses with reference to the themes



that had been highlighted by previous studies in the literature review. Three themes stood out as being particularly salient to the children's perspectives on transition; work, play and identity, and it was these three themes that were used as the basis for analysis and examination of the interplay between social and individual perspectives.

## Summary

In this chapter I have been concerned with explaining the conduct of the study from its inception to its conclusion, highlighting the ethical stance that has informed the research throughout. I have described the theoretical underpinnings of this research as social constructionist, which highlights the importance of both agency in the construction of ideas and structure in its power to limit that construction. From this I explained the rationale behind the research questions and the choice of an ethnographic style case study as being the most effective means of answering those questions.

I have provided background information for the participants and described the process of data collection through a mixture of methods designed both to foreground the children's perspectives and to provide contextual data in which to place those perspectives. I have explained the rationale and the process behind the stages of analysis, using an adaptation of the Mosaic Approach to identify three broad themes, then placing them within the contextual data and on to identifying the most appropriate theoretical explanations for the findings. The chapters that will be concerned with the analysis and discussion of the findings based on the children's perspectives will use the initial strands of play, work and identity as a basis for each

chapter. However, in order to make this analysis clear, I will begin with an exploration of the wider social identities that informed policy making at the time.

## Chapter 3: Societal perspectives

How society or the state view its children will determine what it provides, and thus externally constructed views of childhood may be planted onto existing services. Particular views of children and of children as learners and the ways in which educators are charged to carry out their work are essentially political issues.

(Dunlop 2002: 98)

### Introduction

In this chapter I trace the development of national and local policy frameworks within which the children made the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum with a view to situating the participants' perspectives in the context of the prevailing social perspectives. The first part of this chapter will be concerned with providing a theoretical account of various ways in which in which ideas about curriculum, pedagogy and children can be conceptualised, and which appear to be salient to the development of curriculum policy in England. In the second part of the chapter I will trace that development at national level over the last half of the 20th Century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The third part of the chapter will be an analysis of the iterations of the national curriculum policy that were in force when the research was underway –The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS)* (QCA 2000) and the *National Curriculum* (QCA/DfEE 1999), alongside other pertinent documentation that came from National Government at that time- *The Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics* (DfES 2007), *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfEE 2003) and *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2004). The analysis will explore conceptions of children and pedagogy that underpin these documents. *The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* (DfES 2007) that replaced the *CGFS* was introduced in the year after the children involved in this

study left the Reception. I asked Ms Arthurs (Reception Class teacher) about this, and she replied that they had had a look through it and did not feel as though it would make any difference to their practice. It is for this reason that *EYFS* practice guidance is not included in the analysis of public policy documents.

As well as the national context understanding the local context, which includes the educational, cultural and social understandings of children, parents and teachers and the power relations between these groups is also relevant to studies of transition (Podmore et al. 2000, Brooker 2002, Margetts 2002, Clarke 2007, Fabian and Dunlop 2007). The third part of the chapter will concern itself with the local context of the school itself, and an analysis of the ideas about children that underpinned the curriculum policy development at the school.

## **Part 1: Ideas about children, curriculum and pedagogy**

Curricula, whether national or local, are not neutral but are based on a set of beliefs about children and about the nature and purpose of education (Bernstein 2000). In other words, who we think children are, how they learn best, what it is they should learn and why is fundamental to the development of curriculum and pedagogy (Bruce 1997, Pollard 1999, Brooker 2010, Wood 2010). If the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is to be properly understood, some attempt must be made to uncover the understandings about children (socially produced identities) and beliefs about the role of education both in society and in a child's life (ideology) (Anning 1998) that underpin the *CGFS* and the *National Curriculum*. In this part of the chapter, therefore, I will begin by explaining the various ways in which, children, childhood and the curriculum can be understood.

### 3.11 Ideas about children and childhood

From a constructionist perspective, whilst the biological immaturity of children is undisputed, childhood forms part of the cultural discourse (Mayall 2000, Moss and Petrie 2002, Rogoff 2003, James and James 2004). In this context discourse is used in a Foucauldian sense to refer to the way in which language is used to describe people and institutions and delimit how they are understood, often through the use of metaphor (Foucault and Gordon 2005, Mills 2003). Hendricks (1997) has identified several historical discourses relating to children; romantic, delinquent, and evangelical, for example. James and Prout argue that these perceptions about childhood are both situated in time and pay homage to previous ideas:

Childhood is a shifting social and historical construction and the corollary of this position is that all accounts of childhood must be carefully placed in their proper temporal and spatial context.  
(1997a: 245)

According to Foucault certain discourses are more dominant within some societies or institutions than others and form part of the power dynamic within those societies, privileging some understandings over others (Foucault 1980, MacNaughton 2005). For the purposes of this thesis I want to discuss three discourses concerning childhood: these can be thought of as developmental, as blank slate and as co-constructors of meaning. Whilst children have been conceptualised in different ways throughout history (Hendrick 1997) I have chosen to explore these discourses in particular because they have either dominated in the formation of curriculum policy for young children (Bennett et al. 1997, James and James, 2004) or form a powerful critique of it (Moss and Petrie 2000, Mayall 2002).

A developmental understanding of childhood is highly influenced by the work of philosophers such as Rousseau (James and Prout, 1997a) and pioneers in early childhood education such as Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori (Froebel and Jarvis 1885, Darling 1994, Bruce 1997). The main premise behind developmental discourses of childhood is that there is some kind of hierarchical (and natural) movement between one way of being and thinking and another, each with its own intrinsic learning potential. This development is described as natural and not one that can be rushed, or built upon until fully realised (Wood and Bennett 1999, Donaldson, 1987, Wood, 1998). According to this understanding, children develop, or mature, at different rates through a series of stages; from the simple to the complex, from the irrational to the rational (James and Prout 1997a) and therefore childhood can be seen as being qualitatively different from adulthood but a necessary part of becoming adult. From a developmental perspective, moreover, different stages of childhood are allied to different stages of cognitive understanding and children at different stages of development require specific experiences in order to develop their learning potential (Wood 1998). As I discussed in Chapter 2, developmental views of childhood have formed a key part of transitions theory in relation to the early years of school and therefore need to be thoroughly examined in order to fully understand the context of the transition to Year 1.

A developmental approach privileges children's intrinsic motivations for learning over adults' learning goals. As Wood (1998: 5) puts it "Piaget's theory...places action and self-directed problem-solving at the heart of learning and development. By acting on the world, the learner comes to discover how to control it." A

developmental approach to learning also privileges the learning environment over the role of the adult in leading children's learning. Rather than being directly taught, it is through exploration and interaction with the environment that children learn about how the world works and they need to assimilate certain ideas or schemas before they can learn other more complex schemas. James and Prout (1997a) argue that this developmental account is so pervasive within early childhood institutions that it is very difficult for practitioners to think outside of it, and that it dominates understandings of how to work with young children.

Childhood can also be thought of in terms of a blank slate, a term that derives from Locke's championing of a view of children as *tabula rasa* (Latin for a wax slate that can be written upon). Locke (1997) criticised the popular idea of his day that human knowledge was innate and argued that children's understandings are derived purely from their experiences, including interactions with adults. From this perspective the extrinsic world of adult expectations and understandings is privileged over the inner world of the child and is particularly evident in behaviourist theories that focus on stimulus and response (Moore, 2000); childhood can be seen as deficient; children need to be trained and they need to be taught knowledge and skills before they can become useful and productive members of society.

The third way of looking at childhood is within a social network. From this perspective children are understood as having similar attributes to those of adults; they are understood as 'citizens, members of a social group, agents of their own lives' (within constraints) (Moss and Petrie, 2002 p 101). Rather than being seen as a deficient adulthood childhood is seen as 'an important stage in the life course' (Moss

and Petrie, 2002 p 101). Learning is seen as making meaning through a process of co-construction between the individual and their environment and children's views and understandings are therefore seen as important in their own right as well as the views of adults.

### **3.12 Ideas about learning**

As well as different concepts of children that influence the formation of curriculum three different metaphors about learning have also been identified in discussions about education at all levels from early childhood to adult education; learning as acquisition, as participation and as knowledge creation (Paavola, 2005). Learning as acquisition tends to privilege individual aspects of learning – the mind is seen as a vessel in which knowledge is accumulated (Leinonen et al. 2007). However, this metaphor has been found to be incomplete because of its tendency to decontextualize knowledge (Paavola 2005).

Learning as participation situates learning both within the individual and within a social framework. Leinonen and colleagues conceptualise it as a dialogic understanding where knowledge is socially produced and learned through participation in shared activities leading to the gradual induction of the learner into a society. This metaphor owes much to socio-cultural (Rogoff 2003) and ecological (Bronfenbrenner 1981) theories of development and social constructionist theories of knowledge (Vygotsky 1978, James and Prout 1997) in highlighting the importance of context in understanding how things can be known and providing a broader understanding of knowledge and learning. Paavola argues that the third metaphor, that of learning as knowledge-creation, can be seen as complementary to the other



two and is necessary because neither of the first two metaphors is useful when it comes to the 'deliberate creation of and advancement of knowledge' (page 538).

There is an emerging view that it is unhelpful to focus on one metaphor of learning because it leads to distortions of practice (Sfard, 1997). Sfard argues that neither the knowledge acquisition nor the participation metaphor is sufficient to provide adequate justification for education programs. However, one metaphor may well dominate over another in different approaches to curriculum, as I shall explore further in my analysis of the curriculum documents in part 3 of this chapter.

### 3.13 Ideas about curriculum and pedagogy

As with children and learning, curriculum is a contested term. It can be defined purely as content, as the knowledge and skills that are to be passed on to the learner. Alternatively, curriculum can be used in a broader sense to refer to all of the learning experiences provided by an institution (Siraj-Blatchford 2008, QCA 2000, David 2001). Carr (2002:173), however, contends that the former definition is both superficial and narrow and that 'any adequate view of the curriculum must take into account not only *what* is to be learned, but also *why* and *how* it is to be learned and how it is to be evaluated' (original emphasis) which brings attention to ideas about pedagogy. A curriculum can be designed to be utilitarian – as preparation for the future (either the next step in schooling or the workplace) or as a means of maintaining the social order. There are also idealistic goals behind a curriculum; it can be aimed at inculcating the next generation into what is considered to be the best of culture, or it could be aimed at providing the means to achieve social justice and equity or at allowing the brightest and the best from all sectors of society

opportunities to excel academically as exemplified by the development of grammar schools in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (MacNaughton, 2003).

Although there are several ways in which curricula can be understood (Alexander 1987, in David 2001), the two most relevant categories for a discussion about the transition between the *CGFS* and the *National Curriculum* can be described as child or learner-centred and content-centred. Learner-centred curricula tend to be quite broadly defined in terms of the sum of events experienced by the learner (Brehony 2005, Siraj-Blatchford 2008) and are consistent with a perception of individuals as needing to be both physically and mentally active in the construction of knowledge. In the context of the early years of education, learner-centred curricula can be associated with two of the conceptions of childhood that I discussed above; the learner as a social being, as an active participant in the learning process (James and Pollard, 2008), and the learner as developing through different cognitive stages. Developmental approaches to curriculum tend to emphasise the need to use a learner-centred approach to curriculum as a part of developmentally appropriate practice (Early Years Curriculum Group 1998), and to privilege this approach in pre-schools and infant classrooms (Fisher 2010).

A social participation approach to curriculum emphasises the importance of developing a curriculum that is relevant to the learners' interests and to their current level of experience and understanding. A subject or content-centred approach to curriculum, on the other hand, tends to diminish the active role of the learner, who can be perceived as *tabula rasa* or a blank slate. The learner's own interests and abilities are secondary to the maintenance of the dominant culture and the needs of

industry and his or her role in the in the education process tends to be considered somewhat passive (Moss and Petrie, 2000).

These different views of the curriculum and children often imply different pedagogical approaches. Pedagogy can be understood as the practices, methods and underlying values of teaching (Alexander 2004), bringing together ideas about learners and the purposes of education. Pedagogical approaches based on views of children as developing might privilege a rich environment that provides a range of first hand experiences for example, and to promote a learner-centred curriculum based on young children's interests in order to promote or scaffold their development over a range of areas.

Learner-centred approaches tend to emphasise movement around the classroom, working in small groups or working towards individual goals, and a certain amount of autonomy for the learner (Brehony, 2005). Similarly, a view of children as co-constructors of meaning may well stress the importance of first hand experiences, autonomy, and making use of children's preoccupations and interests, but may also favour more active involvement of adults through practices such as sustained shared thinking, for example (Sylva et al. 2004, Siraj-Blatchford 2008). Content-centred curricula, allied to understandings of children as *tabula rasa* and as passive recipients, tend to favour pedagogical approaches involving direct instruction and transmission of knowledge whereby teachers have explicit responsibility for what is learned.

Bernstein's model of pedagogical interaction has been found useful in describing the implications of different approaches to curriculum (Siraj-Blatchford, 2008).

Bernstein's model is predicated on a differentiation between classification and framing. Classification is to do with the relationships between people; creating and legitimising boundaries between groups of people (Bernstein 2000). These boundaries, which are developed over time and within a specific culture, form the basis of establishing both a cultural identity and a power relationship between those groups and can be either strong or weak. Strong classification means that the boundary between groups is inflexible and the power relations between groups are likely to be dominated by one particular group, whereas in weakly classified systems the boundaries are more elastic and the power relations more evenly balanced. The power relations between these groups create legitimate forms of interaction (Framing), which operate both between and within the group.

Bernstein also differentiates between power and control. Whereas power is related to the grouping of individuals and the power relations between groups, control is to do with the way in which those power relationships are enacted. What is considered appropriate knowledge, for whom, and what are thought of as appropriate means of delivery are part of the discourse of control. Bernstein provides for two distinct forms of discourse: that relating to the social relationships between groups (the regulative discourse) and that relating to understandings of knowledge, teaching and learning (the instructional discourse). As with the regulative discourse, the instructional discourse can be either strongly or weakly classified or framed (for example, between subjects). Although he considers these as separate entities, Bernstein argues that the instructional discourse is always embedded in the regulative discourse, which is dominant (Bernstein 2000:13). Thus the cultural

discourses that underpin how people are grouped and how they interact with each other shape the way in which the curriculum is organised and delivered.

The classification and framing between groups forms a social identity for each group; thus in schools people are described as teachers and pupils rather than adults and children and each group assumes a distinct role in the context of the school. Between each group there are changing power relationships and different ways of interacting. Bernstein claims that in assimilating these relationships teachers learn to behave as school teachers, parents learn to behave as school parents, and children learn how to behave as pupils within the specific culture of the school; a very separate identity from the way in which they are expected to behave in other cultural contexts (Willes 1983, Ellis 2002b).

Different ways of structuring the curriculum are therefore founded on different identities. In Bernstein's terms content-centred curricula tend to be both strongly classified and framed, emphasising the role of the teacher as instructor and authoritarian and accentuating the distinctions between different forms of knowledge (subjects). Child-centred curricula, on the other hand, tend to be more weakly classified and framed and provide a more even (though far from equal) power relationship between teachers and learners. It has been argued that the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are predicated on quite different understandings of learning and learners which creates a tension between them at the transition (Ellis 2002b, Fisher 2010). If this is the case then these understandings should be apparent in both curriculum documents and the everyday interactions in the classroom and there should also be some continuity of these understandings between policy and

practice in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 1. It should also be possible to identify differences in the way that teachers and children are understood between the Key Stages. Analysing curriculum documents, teachers' perspectives and classroom interactions with Bernstein's model in mind should therefore provide an understanding of the different social identities that the children negotiated when making the move between the Reception and Year 1.

In this part of the chapter I have endeavoured to show how the relationship between understandings of children as learners and beliefs about the purposes of education combine to produce certain kinds of curriculum and pedagogy that can be either learner or content-centred. I have argued that learner-centred curricula tend to be predicated on understandings of children as being active agents in the learning process and to favour approaches that promote individual interests, autonomy and a broad understanding of curriculum. Content-centred curricula, on the other hand tend to be founded on understandings of children as blank slates, and to favour approaches that promote the direct transmission of knowledge and skills. Further to this, I have argued that Bernstein's model of pedagogic interaction is a useful starting point for a discussion of the implications of different curricular approaches. The next part of this chapter will look more closely at the development of the *National Curriculum* (DfEE 1999) and the *CGFS* (QCA 2000).

## **Part 2: The context of curriculum development from the 1960's-2000**

### **3.21 Historical Context**

This, for reasons of space, is a very brief account of the historical context in which the *National Curriculum*, the *CGFS* and subsequent policy documents were formed

and will situate these documents in both time and space (James and Prout 1997b). To begin with I will chart the rise of government intervention in school curricula over the last half of the 20th century and the first few years of this, exploring the thinking that led to the introduction of the *National Curriculum* in Primary Schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s. From there I will examine the reactions and criticisms relating to its effect on pedagogical approaches considered appropriate for young children, which led to the introduction of the Foundation Stage at the beginning of the 21st century.

The development of The *National Curriculum* was characterised by ideological debates about the nature and purpose of education. These debates resulted from a distinct trend in English primary schools towards promoting a curriculum that was 'specifically adapted to [children's] stage of physical and intellectual development' (Brehony 2005: 30). It has been argued that this was partially to do with the increasing interest in the relationship between developmental psychology and learning that superseded a focus on behavioural psychology and learning (Gillard 2008). As I described above, a focus on development is based on an understanding of children, particularly in the early years of compulsory education, as having qualitatively and not just quantitatively different cognitive attributes (Brehony 2005). However, it is also the case that an increased interest in learner-centred approaches to education was also partially to do with the ideology of freedom and individuality prevalent in the 1960's and with the abolition of the 11+ in many primary schools which freed them from the pressure of having to prepare children for those tests (Gillard 2008).

Despite official reports, such as the *Plowden Report* (CASE 1967) being generally positive about the trends towards a more child-centred approach to curriculum, particularly in the early years of primary schooling, there was a great deal of opposition, both on ideological and pragmatic grounds, to the increasing influence of child-centred principles on primary education (Gillard 2008). This attack came from several sources including a series of 'Black Papers', the authors of whom strongly supported the traditional, subject oriented, curriculum that they had experienced at grammar schools in the 1950s as a meritocratic system that benefited bright working class individuals. From their perspective the amalgamation of the two tier secondary school system into comprehensive schools and the focus on creativity was seen as a threat to the quality of education (Lowe 2007). In a similar vein, in a speech in 1976 the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, criticized the supposed influence of ideas about learner-centred education, which were held to be responsible for the UK's declining economic prospects; teachers were accused of being poorly equipped to teach basic skills or maintain discipline. These criticisms of learner centred ideals at this time have been cited as initiating the 'Great Debate' about the nature and purpose of education (Gillard 2008).

It is these debates that paved the way for unprecedented political intervention from the Conservative Government in the 1980s, whose political ideology was, according to Paterson (2003), based on bringing constructs such as competition, choice and accountability associated with a free market economy into the public sector. These measures were aimed at raising standards, preparing children for the needs of industry and providing children with a broad and balanced curriculum to which they



were entitled. Only a few primary schools had adopted child-centred methods of education wholesale. Indeed, Simon (2001: 47) argues that 'Surveys have shown that the old-established emphasis on 'the basics' still persisted. The ideal 'Plowden type school identified by the committee formed only a small proportion of such schools.' Nevertheless, there was a perceived crisis in education, something that Gillard (2008) claims was largely created by government in order to justify political intervention. In 1988 the Education Reform Act made provision for the development of a *National Curriculum* whereby what was to be taught in schools was to be mandated by government, thus weakening the power of teachers and Local Authorities (Gillard, 2008). According to Brehony (1990), the effect of these measures was to abolish the idea of a developmentally appropriate curriculum, replacing it with a content-centred, subject-based curriculum from 5-16.

Whilst the *National Curriculum* itself only specified what content was covered in schools, subsequent measures were aimed at controlling how the curriculum was taught in schools. A new supervisory body was formed – The office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The chief inspector, Chris Woodhead, was particularly critical of the child-centred pedagogies that had supposedly been favoured by many primary schools and advocated a return to whole class teaching methods. In addition to this, new tests were introduced in Maths, English and Science at the end of Key Stages 1 (year2), 2 (Year 6) and 3 (Year 9) and schools were expected to adopt a business model with funding being allocated by pupil numbers. The effect of these measures was to bring, supposedly, a sense of competition into the education arena; school improvement would be driven by the desire to attract greater numbers of pupils.

These measures created what Ball (1994b) describes as a threefold attack upon teacher's autonomy through curriculum management, market forces and inspection.

The effect of these measures was to put pressure on schools to teach in what was thought of as a formal manner, with direct instruction and whole class teaching being the preferred means of curriculum delivery. Government intervention in teachers' professional practice did not, moreover, stop there. Although the specification of curriculum content in many subjects was been reduced between 1995 and 2007, government legislation and curriculum guidance led to increasing micro-management of teaching practices particularly in literacy and numeracy with the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies and the emphasis on the three part lesson (introduction, group work, plenary).

The terms 'literacy' and 'numeracy' rather than English and Maths reflected the instrumentalism that was at the heart of these measures and is somewhat reminiscent of the beginnings of universal state education in this country where children were taught a very basic curriculum consisting of the 3 R's (Gillard 2008). There was some evidence that this emphasis led to a narrowing of the curriculum whereby other subjects were being squeezed out of the teaching timetable- particularly those expressive subjects such as art and music and physical education, which were at one time considered to be a very important part of the primary curriculum (Boyle and Bragg 2006).

At the same time as curriculum reforms were taking place in the 1990's, schools, encouraged by a system of vouchers funding education for four year old children, were beginning to lower the age at which children could begin school (Sharp 1998).

More and more children were starting in the Reception either at the beginning of the school year, irrespective of when they were due to turn 5 or in two cohorts; older children at the beginning of September and younger children at the beginning of January. Government funding of three and four-year-olds was partly a result of the emphasis that was increasingly being placed upon the influence of early childhood experiences in later life (Ball 1994a). The number of children attending both state funded and private pre-school establishments rose sharply during this time, and the government decided to produce a common framework across the pre-school sector to ensure that 'young children were taught the right things...[so] they would have a flying start and standards of later achievement would inevitably rise.' (Adams et al. 2004: 9). This framework took shape as the '*Desirable Outcomes for Early Learning*' a document of which Adams and her colleagues were extremely critical, claiming that it was based on ideas about young children that were both unrealistic and anodyne.

Problems also arose from the confusion about what constituted statutory school age, which, in England is the term after a child turns five. As I have argued above, many children in Reception Classes were below (and in some cases a long way below) statutory school age, which is in itself one of the youngest starting ages in Europe (Sharp 1998). Concerns were raised that these children, who could have been just four years old when they first entered Reception were being asked to follow a school curriculum, informed by the *National Curriculum*, that was inappropriate for their age and level of development. It was not necessarily the content of the curriculum that caused concern, however, but the pedagogical approaches that were being used to organize the curriculum (Sharp 1998, Early Years Curriculum Group

1998, Bennett et al. 1999). These concerns were influenced by a Piagetian understanding of children as being developmentally unsuited to formal or traditional methods of instruction and needing to be able to explore and discover for themselves (Early Years Curriculum Group 1998).

The Foundation Stage was supposedly created to clarify the confusion that had been caused. Relating to children between the ages of three and five (although now from 0-5), it encompassed both Nursery and Reception classes as a distinct Key Stage separate from Key Stage 1. Replacing the *Desirable Outcomes*, The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS)* (QCA 2000) was introduced as a non-statutory framework for practice across early childhood provision. It was made clear that children in the Reception were expected to follow a curriculum based on The *CGFS* rather than on the Key Stage 1 *National Curriculum*, although this injunction was somewhat watered down by the requirement that the literacy and numeracy hours should be largely in place by the end of the Reception year.

The introduction of the Foundation Stage, however, produced its own set of difficulties. There were concerns that the move from Reception to Year 1 caused an abrupt disjuncture that had the potential to lead to difficulties for both children and teachers (Ellis 2002a, IFF-Research 2003, Sanders et al. 2005). These reports couched these differences in terms of a lack of fit between the way in which the curriculum was organised – the six areas of learning of the Foundation Stage, and the 12 discrete subjects of the National Curriculum. Rather than being a problem of organisation and wording, however, as the above discussion has argued, these differences can be seen as the product of competing educational ideologies (Ellis

2002b) that are underpinned by different conceptions of children as learners and teachers as educators and the emphasis on competence or performance criteria (Bernstein 2000, Jeffrey 2006).

In order to fully understand the disjuncture between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, given the level of government involvement in the minutiae of education practices, it is necessary to examine key curriculum documents closely to determine what particular views of children are evident and how significant changes between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 reflect different conceptions of children as learners Ellis (2002b). At the time that the children involved in the study were in the Reception (July 2007) curriculum planning was informed by the *CGFS* (QCA 2000), and it is this, therefore, rather than the current *Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance* (DCSF 2008) that formed the basis of the analysis. In the next part of this chapter I will look more closely at the curriculum documents that were developed in both the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 between the inception of the Foundation Stage in 1999 and the beginning of my study in 2007.

### **3.22: Curriculum policy documents 1999-2007**

In analysing the *CGFS* I used a key word search using HyperResearch™, which highlighted all the instances that mentioned children and learning, including the metaphors of participation and acquirement that I described in part 1, as it was most likely that the way these words were used in the various policy documents would indicate the identities of children, and children as learners in particular that underpinned the curriculum design. Similar analyses were undertaken on the

*National Curriculum*, the *Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics (Primary Framework)* (DfES 2007),

*Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003), and *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2004), however I also included a key word search for pupil in these documents as the search for children was less successful, particularly in the *National Curriculum* itself. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, these documents were chosen as they have been prominent in the literature on schools over the last ten years (Brehony 2005, Alexander 2004).

The most notable thing about this exercise was that with the exception of the *Primary Framework*, there was only a limited amount of use of words such as acquirement or participation in terms of learning. Learning tended to be associated in the rest of the documents with achievement; children were expected to ‘achieve or go beyond’ the early learning goals in the *CGFS*, they were expected to ‘enjoy and achieve’ in *Excellence and Enjoyment*, to ‘achieve their full potential’ in *Every Child Matters* and ‘to learn and achieve’ in the *National Curriculum*. However, although the exercise was useful in noting trends and patterns, it was less successful in discerning the dominant views about children in these documents and therefore a closer examination was necessary.

### **3.221 The Foundation Stage**

According to the *CGFS* Foundation stage children are aged between three and five years of age. Because they are not of statutory school age (the term after they turn five years of age), they may or may not be in institutional education, but it is most likely that the vast majority of children towards the end of the Foundation Stage will

be in Reception Classes in Primary or First schools, depending on Local Authority organisation (Sanders et al. 2004).

The organisation of the *CGFS* into 6 areas of learning and experience is consistent with a weakly classified curriculum (Bernstein 2000), and process and development as opposed to content are the dominant characteristics. For example, the *CGFS* points out that 'One experience may provide a child with opportunities to develop a number of competencies, skills and concepts across several areas of learning' (p26). However the headings of the areas of learning and experience reveal what is considered as important in terms of learning. Despite the weak classification, there is an emphasis on the kinds of knowledge and skills that children are expected to attain by the time they leave the Foundation Stage (Wood 2010), and is particularly strong for the Reception Class where there is an emphasis on the linguistic and mathematical areas with the injunction that the *Primary Framework* (see later) should be in place by the end of the Reception Year.

Most of the *CGFS* is taken up with explaining to practitioners how they should interact with children, their role in children's development, and the importance of interaction with parents, which in itself suggests a view of practitioners as deficient in professional judgement and early childhood education as technical practice rather than a contested, value-driven field of social interaction (Moss and Petrie 2000). However, these are underpinned by both implicit and explicit understandings of children who are 'develop[ing] rapidly during this time –physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially' which, according to Margaret Hodge (foreword), then Minister for Education, makes the Foundation Stage a critical time for children's

learning. This developmental theme is further reinforced by the headings of the 6 areas of learning and experience and by the stepping stones to the Early Learning Goals that children should reach or go beyond by the time they leave the Foundation Stage and enter Key Stage 1. The *CGFS* therefore would seem to be predicated on a developmental understanding of children as discussed in section 3.2.

The *CGFS* does not portray Foundation Stage children as passively developing however. Whilst not as strong as the developmental metaphor, the sense of children as social participants in the learning process is present within the document and they are seen as both active and instrumental in their learning. For example 'Children deepen their understanding by playing, talking, observing, planning, questioning, experimenting, testing, repeating, reflecting and responding to adults and to each other.'(p6) and 'Children explore, experiment, plan and make decisions for themselves, thus enabling them to learn, develop and make good progress.'(p12). The *CGFS* therefore puts forward a view of children as capable of making good choices about their learning, initiating learning activities and understanding that it is through these choices that they are able to make progress in their learning.

It is interesting to note the specific allusions to Foundation Stage Children and to children of specific ages; 'Children aged three, four and five are constantly encountering new experiences and seeking to understand them in order to extend their skills, develop their confidence and build on what they already know' (p6). Again, there is a distinctly developmental underpinning to the way in which children are understood in the Foundation Stage, and a differentiation between these children and children of other ages, as if they are somehow different and have



different learning needs from other age groups. However, from a developmental perspective there are few cognitive differences between children of three, four and five, and children of six and seven (Fisher 2010), which makes the differentiation between the Foundation Stage and key Stage 1 somewhat arbitrary.

The *CGFS* (2000) therefore starts from a premise that children are willing, active, independent, competent learners. Children, as far as the *CGFS* is concerned, are individuals in the learning context, who are able to make decisions about their own learning, and the document provides a strong basis for a child centred pedagogy and an emphasis on play as an important vehicle for learning. However, to take this at face value is somewhat misleading. What the *CGFS* has to say about practice effectively constrains the possibilities that children have to make choices about their learning. Children may learn through play, but in order for appropriate learning to take place, that play must be 'Well-planned', and must also lead towards

'developing key learning skills such as listening, speaking, concentration, persistence and learning to work together and cooperate with other children. It is also about developing early communication, literacy and numeracy skills that will prepare young children for Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum'.

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As far as the *CGFS* is concerned, what is appropriate for children to learn about, and the contexts within which they learn are, therefore, not controlled by them, but by practitioners, who carefully manipulate and control the environment in order to achieve/acquire the desirable outcomes (or early learning goals as they were renamed). In other words, whilst children may be willing, active and competent learners, they need others to tell them the right things to learn. It is not my intention at this point to criticise this as an aim, but merely to point out that, as Bernstein (2000) argues, even where classification and framing are weak, the autonomy of the

learner is only apparent. In fact such an approach is consistent with early years' traditions stemming from Froebel and Montessori, amongst others, which place a high value on the autonomy of the individual whilst providing carefully planned environments to support learning (Bruce, 1997).

There are, however, tensions between notions of competence and performance within the *CGFS*. Ideas about competence seem to fit with the metaphors of acquisition and participation. The learner acquires competence through participating in the social world of the classroom (Pollard and Filer, 1999). Ideas about performance, however, are about the learner achieving that knowledge and those skills. According to Bernstein (2000), achievement has connotations of benchmarks and testing, whereas acquirement seems to emphasise a continuum of individual learning. As I mentioned in the introduction to this section achievement is one of the most often used words in the document, and it is possible, especially with the policy emphasis on standards and testing that a focus on achievement outweighed ideas about learning as either acquirement or participation. For example, within the *CGFS* there is a great deal of emphasis, particularly in the introduction, that children 'will achieve and some, where appropriate, will go beyond the early learning goals by the end of the Foundation Stage' (p4). This emphasis on achievement is particularly strong within the strands of literacy and mathematics, which are also subject to the *Primary Framework* (DfES 2007).

There are therefore tensions, or discontinuities, within the *CGFS* itself in the way in which children are portrayed (Ellis 2002b). While they may be active, individual, creative learners who are able to make learning choices, they make those choices

within an environment that is heavily controlled and constrained by adults. While they come into the Foundation stage as individuals, who have a diversity of skills and experience on which to draw, they are, during their time there, in fact working towards common, homogenising, goals that are geared towards preparing them for the next stage in their education.

### *3.222 The National Curriculum at Key Stage 1*

Apart from a brief reference in the introduction The *National Curriculum* document (1997) itself has little to say about children as individuals and starts from the premise that children are not in fact children as such, but pupils: homogenous, deficient, dependent learners who need to be taught specific knowledge and skills (Pollard and Filer 1999). While the introduction to the *National Curriculum* acknowledges the fact that children enter school with a range of knowledge, skills and interests, this is largely ignored in a curriculum that is situated within the discourse of entitlement and concerns the purposes of education rather than learning or children per se. Children (and through them their families and the wider society) are entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum and to have access to specific knowledge and skills (prescribed by government policy) that will enable them to take their places as productive members of society. The organisation of the document into subjects suggests a strongly classified curriculum, with an emphasis on content, performance and achievement, as opposed to process and acquisition. Pupils, within the *National Curriculum* are passive in the sense that they have little control over the content or pace of their learning.

Although Government policy documents between 1999 and 2007 retained the notion of entitlement, there were modifications with regard to discrete subjects and the discourse of children as pupils. In response to criticisms that the *National Curriculum* was overloaded and over prescriptive, subsequent policy documents sought to amend the curriculum to allow for some flexibility in planning the curriculum and also sought to clarify its position with regard to understandings of children as learners.

Primary school children in these documents (*Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfEE 2003), *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2004), and the revised *Primary Framework* (DfES 2007)) were entitled to enjoy their learning, to be inspired, motivated and engaged; they were entitled to be seen as individuals, with individual needs. Those needs, however, were defined within the context of the *National Curriculum*, prescribed by policy makers and maintained children in a subordinate position re decision making about their learning, sustaining the 'assumptions of passivity, deficiency and dependency ... embodied in the social representation of 'pupil' within much common sense thinking' (Pollard and Filer 1999: 6). Competent teachers were able to provide stimuli that engaged, motivated and inspired children as individuals but understandings of children were passive; they needed to be motivated, engaged, and inspired by excellent teaching. Unlike children in the Foundation Stage, either they were not perceived as having their own motivations or interests or these motivations and interests did not have value within mainstream education.

The Labour Government committed itself to providing guidance based on evidence. What I have found interesting in reading through these documents is that model

examples that they provided generally portrayed children as junior partners in the learning process, yet an understanding of children's agency, explicitly stated within the *CGFS*, is only touched upon in these policy documents, the central aims of which (achievement, standards, content), remain largely unchanged.

In terms of curriculum, there was little continuity in the way in which the *CGFS* and the *National Curriculum* were organised, which was highlighted as a particular concern over the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (Ellis 2002a, Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al 2005). However, later documents (*Every Child Matters, Excellence and Enjoyment*) began to emphasise the relationship between subjects, weakening classification and providing a framework for teachers to link subjects together— somewhat akin to the topic approach to curriculum advocated pre-*National Curriculum* and potentially making the differences between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 a little less dichotomous. The *Primary Framework*, however, remained strongly classified, maintaining the dominant position of literacy and numeracy in the curriculum.

There were also signs that policy makers were using the transitional discourse of continuity and change to provide stronger links between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The fact that the *Primary Framework* was meant to be introduced gradually over the Reception Year, with it being mostly in place by the end of that year, together with the renewed interest in play meant that the transition into Year 1 may not have been as abrupt as was claimed. At the same time, there was enough evidence to support the view that the transition from the Reception to Year 1 was problematic. What is interesting is that the two most comprehensive reports to date

attribute this to different causes. For Sanders and her colleagues, lack of opportunity for learning through play was cited as one of the most common reasons why children find the transition difficult. Ofsted, on the other hand, reported that one of the main sources of difficulty is a lack of fit between what is being taught and children's level of ability. There are problems with both of these claims, however. The belief that children view play as a vehicle for learning is one that has been contested (Howard 2010), and the focus on ability reduces children's experiences in Year 1 to passive recipients of the teachers' planning.

However, the renewed interest in play as a vehicle for learning evident in the *CGFS* also provided a context whereby the content-centred curriculum of Key Stage 1 could be adapted to work with child-centred principles - The Foundation Stage curriculum in Wales (DfCELLs, 2008) for example, covers schooling from nursery until the end of Year 2 encompassing the whole of Key Stage 1. There was also evidence that some schools in England were continuing Foundation Stage practices at least into the first term of Year 1 (Sanders et al. 2005), thus making the transition between the Reception and Year 1 smoother.

In this section I have looked particularly at the ways in which children and learning are talked about in the context of national education policy documents that were extant at the time of the study. The significant difference relevant to this study is the way in which children and learning were identified within the contexts of the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. In the Foundation Stage, understandings of children as both developing and as active agents are present. The way in which children are portrayed in national curriculum policy documents at Key Stage 1,

however, tends to imply a more passive view of children with regard to their education, and an understanding of children as *tabula rasa* is most evident. From this perspective, as Pollard and Filer put it: education is ‘something which is done *to* children, not *with* children, and still less *by* children (1999:23, original emphasis). There are signs, however, that between 2000 and 2008, policy makers were beginning to acknowledge the role of children as agents in their own learning, albeit within the context of a curriculum of prescribed content. With regard to learning, there were some significant tensions within the *CGFS* itself between understandings of learning as acquisition, participation and achievement, that had the potential to cause difficulties for teachers, particularly in the Reception as they attempted to marry these different perspectives together (Ellis 2002b, Wood 2010.) In the next section I will look more closely at the organisation of the school involved in the study and the implications for children in this context.

### **Part 3: The school context**

#### **3.32 School documentation**

In order to find out the views of children that the school put forward, I analysed the curriculum policy document and the school’s prospectus that were current at the time of the study. As with the National policy documents, I performed a key word search using similar terminology to determine the links, if any, between the school documents and the National policy documents. The views of children put forward by the curriculum policy and the prospectus were quite varied. On the one hand, children were seen as being active participants in the life of the school, with a school council, and an Eco-committee who met to make suggestions about the running of

the school. Alongside this there were statements that related to children as individuals with varying levels of ability (by which they are grouped in class) and with individual needs that should be taken into consideration. There was also an understanding of children as having rights- being entitled to a broad and balanced curriculum designed to facilitate progress and continuity in their learning, and having the right to be treated with dignity and respect. At the same time there were many statements in the documents that relate to children as becoming- achieving their potential, developing moral values, preparing them for the next stage in their education. There is also a sense of children being constrained- of maintaining a conventional appearance, being punctual and conforming to the school rules (of which more later).

The dominant metaphor for learning at the beginning of Winterbourne School's curriculum policy document was acquisition; of a list of 31 stated aims, 12 related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, some of which referred specifically to the National Curriculum subject areas. Further into the document participation became more dominant as children were encouraged to 'pose their own questions and pursue their own ideas and issues and 'take responsibility for their own learning and have confidence in their own abilities' (p4). Many of the aims related to the development of attitudes. For example, one of the stated aims was for children to 'Develop tolerance, respect and appreciation of the feelings and capabilities of others in an unbiased way' and 'to begin acquiring a set of moral values, such as honesty, sincerity, personal responsibility on which to base their own behaviour' (p2).



There seemed to be elements of several ideological stances in the two documents that I analysed. For example, the importance that the curriculum document placed on the development of moral and social attitudes and dispositions demonstrated both a broad understanding of curriculum that included the 'totality of pupils' learning experiences (p1) and an ideological approach to education as a reforming force (MacNaughton 2003), which was also evident in the school's emphasis on ecological issues (it has several awards for Ecological awareness and is an Eco-School). However, there were also examples of a meritocratic approach to curriculum, with children being grouped by ability (Gillard 2008).

The influence of government policy was evident in the document with references to the use of 'well-planned play' (the *CGFS*) in the Foundation Stage, a broad and balanced curriculum from Key Stage 1 onwards providing continuity and progression (*National Curriculum*). Similarly, the influence of *Excellence and Enjoyment* can be seen in the references to personalised learning and 'linking subjects', and *Every Child Matters* in the focus on equity, social justice and special educational needs. At the same time, there is also evidence of the tensions and contradictions that exist in the National policy documents. However, there is a question to how far the teachers themselves had ownership of this curriculum document. When asked, none of the three teachers with whom I worked gave any indication that they had read the policy document or that they thought of it as particularly relevant to their practice in school, preferring to work from the medium term plans that had been devised and handed down from other teachers, or from the schemes of work developed by the QCA (I will comment on this further when I come to explore the teachers' thinking).

### 3.33 School Organisation

The school had one Nursery class that admitted children from the term after their third birthday for either a morning or an afternoon session. There were more places in the Nursery than there were in the school and not all of the children who attended the Nursery gained a place in the Reception. There were two Reception classes; Clematis and Sycamore. At the time that this study was conducted the Reception had two points of entry. Children whose 5th birthday fell between September and March went into the Reception in September. Those children who turned 5 between April and August joined them in January. The Nursery had one class teacher and two full time Nursery Nurses. In the Reception there were two Reception class teachers, Ms Arthur (Clematis) and Ms Benson (Sycamore), who shared a Nursery Nurse (Ms Chatteris) between them. There were also other teaching assistants who worked with the children in the classes, and often parents who volunteered their time to come and read or play with the children or to share some specialised knowledge. The way in which the classrooms were organised within the school building effectively separated the Foundation Stage from the rest of the school and Years 1, 2 and 3 from Years 4, 5 and 6. According to the school prospectus the Nursery and Reception operated as a Foundation Stage Unit;

At Winterbourne School we use “mix up” time, a form of play which allows for individual differences, first hand real experiences and well planned play. Adults working in the Nursery make observations and keep records to track how each child is progressing. These are recorded in the Foundation Stage Profile for each child.  
(Accessed Nov 2007)

It might seem that Winterbourne School was following a trend at that time where Foundation Stage Units were being set up in schools as a response to the introduction of the *CGFS* (Garrick and Chilvers 2003). However, according to my field

notes (July 2007), although the relationship between the Reception and Nursery was closer than it was with the rest of the school, they operated different time-tables, pursued different projects and, although the children could ostensibly move between all the rooms of the Foundation Unit at certain times of the day, the children in the Reception showed very little evidence of wanting to go into the Nursery classroom at the end of the school year.

The organisation of the school therefore separated the Foundation Stage in space and time from the rest of the school, which meant that the classification (Bernstein, 2000) between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 was much stronger than it was between Key Stages 1 and 2 for example. It would seem that Reception children, to an extent, were isolated from the rest of the school, confirming the findings of Adams and her colleagues (2004) that the introduction of the Foundation Stage had done little to ameliorate the ambiguous nature of the Reception Year. Indeed, in terms of school organisation, there was a significant discontinuity between the Reception and Year 1 that had the potential to set up a particular identity for children in the Foundation Stage as being 'the little ones'. As I shall explain in Chapter 6 this view was understood by the children and coloured their perceptions of both the Reception and of Year 1.

### **3.34 School Curriculum Organisation**

The organisation of the curriculum also separated the Reception from Year 1. The Reception used the *CGFS* as a basis for planning and had developed their own materials for teaching phonics and number, whereas curriculum planning in Year 1 was informed by both the *National Curriculum* and the *Primary Framework*

(curriculum policy document, accessed November 2007). However, this was not the only place where there was discontinuity. The Reception timetable was separated into two parts, teaching time and Mix-up time. Mix-up time was the name given to periods during the day where the focus was on planning for children's choices. During Mix-up time the children were able to move freely both indoors and outdoors and were able to choose what they wanted to do from a variety of activities that had been set up for them, several of which had direct links with the topic that had been planned for the term (unless they were asked to work in a small group with an adult).

During teaching-time the children were required to follow the teacher's directions, usually sat as a class on the carpet, but also for P.E, ICT and singing. Both Mix-up time and teaching time formed part of the curriculum in the Reception, and were premised on very different ideas about children's learning; Mix-up time can be allied with the kinds of learner identities associated with learner centred curricula and teaching time with more passive assumptions about children's learning associated with content driven curricula. The split between teaching time and Mix-up time, which happened on a daily basis, and sometimes more than once a day, can be described as a horizontal transition within the Reception itself (Johansson 2007). Johansson describes a horizontal transition as one where an individual moves backwards and forwards between different settings (between home and school for example) and argues that these transitions require children to continually adjust their behaviour to suit different social conditions. On a daily basis, the children were expected to adjust their behaviour from being able to move freely around the

Foundation Unit and make choices about what they were doing to sitting on the carpet and following teacher directions.

Wood (2010) claims that a separation between play and work is one way in which Reception Class teachers manage the competing demands of the Foundation Stage Curriculum that I noted in part 2 of this chapter (see also Adams et al. 2004). It would appear that these tensions were recreated in the way in which the curriculum was organised at Winterbourne School. The transition from an early years child-centred pedagogy to a more formal, content based pedagogy did not, therefore, happen between the Reception and Year 1 but during the Reception year itself.

## Summary

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is to illustrate the continuities and discontinuities between understandings of children and curriculum in policy formation and implementation that the children had to negotiate over the transition between Reception and Year 1. I have argued that the *CGFS* was underpinned by conceptions of children both as developing through a series of stages and as active agents in their learning. I have also argued that there were some significant tensions within the *CGFS* with regard to understandings of learning as acquisition and learning as achievement. I have contended that, although the dominant understanding of children in documentation relating to Key Stage 1 tended to be passive, there was an emerging view of children as active agents in the later policy documents of the Labour Government relating to primary schooling led by what is regarded as good practice in schools.

Using Bernstein's model I have argued that while the Foundation Stage Curriculum has a weaker classification between most of the areas of learning than the subject areas of the National Curriculum, the strong classification of literacy and mathematics in particular, driven by the primary framework, with its emphasis on phonics and number, encourages a more 'formal' approach to these things in the Reception than might otherwise be considered appropriate, and that these formal approaches were based on different conceptions of children and learning that create a split in the curriculum between Mix-up time and teaching time. In the next chapters I will argue that the transition from the Reception to Year 1 at Winterbourne school could be understood as the phasing out of Mix-up time (play) and the increased dominance of teacher control (work) in the curriculum and I will explore the effects that this had on children's perspectives about work and play and identity.

## **Chapter 4: Perspectives on work over the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1**

### **Introduction**

This chapter pertains to the question, 'How do children's perspectives about school change over the transition from Reception to Year 1?' in relation to their school work. It is about how the changes from the Reception to Year 1 affected children's thinking about work, their feelings about work and themselves as workers/learners in school, and also about how these different thoughts and feelings influenced the way they managed work in Year 1. In order to understand fully how the children's perceptions about work changed between the Reception and Year 1, it is important to recognise that what is meant by work in terms of school and schooling is far from straightforward, but is loaded with culturally derived understandings and values, which need to be interpreted (Garvey 1991). The definition of work that I begin with is activities children are required to do by an adult (as opposed to what they have chosen to do, which is often thought of as play) (Bruce 1997). That children share this conception of work is well supported in literature on children's ideas about play and work (Robson 1993, Wing 1995 Howard 2005). Likewise, the initial evidence supplied by the children involved in this study indicated that they shared a similar understanding of work.

The chapter will be organised into three parts. Based on the contention, discussed in chapter 2, that the environment, including other people's views and actions has a big influence on children's perceptions, (Shilling 1992, James and James 2004, Graue and Walsh 2005, Greene and Hill 2005) the first part will be composed of a discussion of

the changing contexts between the Reception and the Year 1 classrooms in the first and second terms of Year 1, making use of Bernstein's model of classification and framing to make examine the way in which the curriculum was organised. Because teachers' perspectives as well as the change from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 influenced the organisation of work and play, this section will include comments and discussions of points raised by the interviews with the teachers, field notes and observational material. In the second part of the chapter I will explore in depth what the children said about the changes to their school experience, and how their thinking about work developed over the transition between the Reception and Year 1.

I will also use this opportunity to make links between this study and other studies about children's thinking about work and the transition from pre-school to school (Peters 2000, Dunlop 2002, Sanders et al. 2005, Einarsdottir 2007, Stephenson and Parsons 2007, White and Sharp 2007). Part three will go on to examine the way in which the children's feelings about work changed over the transition and endeavour to explain the relationship between the pedagogical contexts and how the children's attitudes towards their work developed over their time in Year 1. Throughout the chapter I will endeavour to relate the children's perspectives both to the changes in their environment and to other research into the transition to 'formal' schooling and how they relate to conceptions of transition that were discussed in the literature review – readiness, continuity/discontinuity, identity and resilience.



## **Part 1: The changing contexts of work in Reception and Year 1**

One of the biggest differences between each term is the relative amount of time that was spent in different types of activity and in the way in which these activities were organised by the teachers. For the purposes of the ensuing discussion these activities have been loosely grouped into three categories; carpet work, individual/small group work and play. The carpet space was used in various different ways in both the Reception and in Year 1. For example the children sat on the carpet whilst the register was being taken, playing games as a whole class or during show and tell. This chapter however will concentrate particularly on carpet work that involved the whole class engaged in teacher directed activities, usually, but not exclusively seated on the carpet. Individual/small group work was also teacher directed, but the children were usually sat at a table and would be engaged in activities either by themselves, or with a partner or in a group of around four or five children. During play, children had opportunities to decide on their own activities, as I shall explore in more detail in the next chapter. One of the limitations of this study, however, is the short amount of time spent in the Reception which means that the impressions I received provide only a snapshot of the last few weeks of the Reception Year.

In order to fully understand the context of the move from the Reception to Year 1 I undertook a detailed analysis of the evidence culled from observations and field notes using Bernstein's model of pedagogic interaction (see chapter 3 and appendix D). This analysis revealed that there was a great deal of complexity involved in the move from the Reception to Year 1 which was as much to do with the teacher's

views about teaching and learning as it was with the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 as the ensuing discussion will explore.

The comments from the teachers (below) reveal something of their ideas about what it meant to them to be a teacher. All three of the teachers took a practical view of teaching, downplaying any reliance on educational theories and citing the influence of experience and getting ideas from other teachers as more pertinent to their practice. Nevertheless, theories about children's learning and about teaching were evident throughout, which supports the view that theories and beliefs about teaching form part of general knowledge and may be implicitly held rather than consciously enacted (Fang 1996).

Well, er, child-centred, a child-centred approach, um, to learning, be it, you know, you can be more impulsive, if you see a child who is interested in a particular thing, like we had this year, we had a real interest in volcanoes. And so that just took off, you know, and then we just changed what we had originally planned, and we, you know, particularly in Class, once again, it's very child-centred in that I might be doing something different to Mrs Benson (Sycamore Class)  
(July 2007)

In this excerpt from an interview, Ms Arthur is putting forward a perspective whereby children's interests are taken and used as a basis for planning, rather like the integrated approach that Wood and colleagues (2010) have promoted. Ms Arthur's interview data further suggests that she had a view of children as partners in the learning process; she felt that it was important for the children to see themselves as learners and that it was part of her job provide the children with the opportunity to reflect on their own learning and to make choices with regard to learning opportunities. The influence of early years' educational philosophy is evident throughout Ms Arthur's interview data and is reflective of her journey into teaching (see Chapter 2 part 4.2).

Ms Hunt also expressed a child-centred approach to teaching; when talking about what she liked best about teaching she told me “Just the children. I don’t like planning. No, I do like the planning, but I like doing the planning with the children” (November 2007), which implies a view of children as agents in the learning process similar to that of Ms Arthur. However, the analysis of interview data, observations and field notes revealed a great deal of conflict in Ms Hunt’s ideas about teaching. It is not the purpose of this thesis to go too far into the analysis of the conflict that Ms Hunt was experiencing- only insofar as it impacted on her interactions with the children. These interactions show that, whilst she was keen to involve them in choosing the music to signal tidy up time and changing time for P.E., and to give them opportunities to play, she was also very concerned that the children should achieve a certain level of skill and expertise, especially in number, as this excerpt from my field notes reveals.

It was singing practice ... and the teachers use this time to discuss planning. Ms Hunt told Mrs Green (teacher of parallel class) that she was abandoning the maths planning for the week because the children seemed to be quite shaky on number facts such as 1 less and so she was going to concentrate on this. Mrs Green asked her what she was going to do for the children who had already got this, but she did not really answer her. After Mrs Green had left, Ms Hunt told me that she knew that people like Ollie and Danny and one or two others were quite confident with this, but that it wouldn’t matter for them to be bored for a bit. Her experiences as a Year 2 teacher had made her keen to ensure that all the children were solid on understanding number facts like more and less, and so she was keener to work with those that were having difficulty.  
(Field notes 26.10.07)

Far from allowing the children’s own agendas to lead her practice, there is little evidence during work time that the children’s interests influenced her planning to any great extent. The tensions and contradictions that Ms Hunt displayed, both in her interview and practice, would seem to be a common problem for teachers of

children in the early years of school (Bennett et al. 1997, Adams et al. 2004). It is the tension between the differing constructions of children, curriculum and learning that I described in Chapter 3- the tension between the need to make progress towards specific goals and the desire to promote children's learning in ways that support their interests and agency (Wood 2010).

Ms Ives, whilst she did not appear to be quite so conflicted as Ms Hunt, put forward quite different views about children as learners and her role in their learning from either Ms Hunt or Ms Arthur. Ms Ives expressed a clear sense of herself as the kind of teacher described in policy documents such as *Excellence and Enjoyment* (See Chapter 3 part 2); she saw her role as a teacher to engage the children's interests through planning fun activities and to inspire them with the desire to learn;

I suppose in Year 1, trying to get them interested, you know, trying to capture their interest, which I do find, I think Year 1 is really difficult because, suddenly making this jump from you know, from play based Reception, into, sort of the National Curriculum. They find that quite difficult, but I try and bear that in mind. Er, capture interest (as in a list), make it exciting, make them want to learn, and enjoy school.  
(from interview with Ms Ives, June 2008)

The conflicts and tensions that I noted in the policy documents in chapter 3 (part 2) were also apparent in way that the teachers talked about their practice. All three teachers mentioned feeling constrained in one way or another. Ms Arthur talked about having to accommodate the school practices and the beliefs of other team members, whereas Ms Hunt felt that the National Curriculum was a big barrier to her preferred way of teaching because of the need to make progress towards the End of Key Stage assessments. Ms Hunt was particularly ambivalent about the National Curriculum as, despite claiming that it prevented her from working with the children's ideas, she criticised it for being both 'wishy-washy' and not specific

enough. Ms Ives also mentioned the National Curriculum as being difficult, but for her the difficulty lay in trying to come up with new and exciting ways of doing things.

In this discussion I have provided a snapshot of the way in which the school day was organised and some background details into the beliefs and views of the teachers who kindly agreed to allow me to do the research with the children in their classroom. I have established that, whilst the teachers did not profess to particular theories about learning and education, preferring to take a practical approach of using ideas from other teachers, nevertheless they stated clear theoretical standpoints in their conversations with me. I have also argued that there is evidence of tension and conflict between the teachers' beliefs and the constraints of working within the bounds of a nationally imposed curriculum, and having to negotiate with other members of staff who held different beliefs. In the next few paragraphs, I will use the evidence gathered from field notes and observations to examine the teaching practices in more depth.

#### **4.11 Reception- Ms Arthur**

It was my impression that at the latter end of the Reception Year the children spent great deal of time sitting on the carpet for various reasons including administration and teaching time. This was at the end of the Reception Year and evidence from Ms Arthur indicates that the proportion of Mix-up time to teaching time had changed over the year:

Well yeah, they initially started like very short erm singing... like maths would be just a counting song or something to do with number um and likewise literacy again, it would be something ... start off with a song, or something, and a really short activity, but that will be it, and then kind of just working up more and more to that and recently, we've started doing the first part of literacy on the carpet and then

moving them on to activities at the tables and we'll be able to work with one group, and then obviously three groups are working independently –well that's the idea (laugh).  
(July 2007)

The evidence suggests that the Reception year was thought of in terms of a gradual transition from the play based structure of the Nursery to the more formal structure of Key Stage 1, which is consistent with findings from Adams and colleagues (2004) that the Reception Year is somewhat isolated from both the Nursery and Year 1 and is in a rather ambivalent position with regard to pedagogy. Ms Arthur was aware of this ambivalence, telling me;

'Reception's quite a difficult one, because in the Nursery there are clear guidelines for staff ratios and year one, there are clear guidelines, but Reception is kind of your grey area isn't it? It's like, yes, one teacher to thirty children, but there's no guidelines to what support [for children's learning] is given'.  
(July 2007)

Teaching time was largely focused on either literacy or numeracy using plans that had been devised by previous teachers some years ago. Although these were used as vehicles for the topic work that was planned in the Reception taking into account the areas of learning specified in the *CGFS* (See Chapter 3). There were whole class P.E. and ICT sessions and, in addition to whole class teaching times, the teachers would select small groups of children to work with during Mix-up time. The children were expected to follow teachers' instructions, to sit with their legs crossed and to put up their hands if they wished to talk, emphasising the explicitly dominant nature of the teacher's power during these times. It could be argued that the emphasis on following the rules and especially the carpet rules signifies a distinct socialising aspect to the way in which teaching time was organised, thus supporting Willes' (1983) contention that the early years of schooling are largely concerned with inculcating appropriate pupil behaviours in children which has an impact on their

ideas about identity (I will discuss this aspect of schooling in more depth in Chapter 6). Observations also provide evidence that she was prepared to take children's responses to her own questions and work with them rather than insisting upon 'correct' replies.

Work time in the Reception tended to be organised as group activities. Sitting on the carpet Ms Arthur and the children would read big books together, write sentences together, sing number songs and count together. Alternatively they might be asked to work in small groups or individually under the supervision of an adult; reading, making books, playing number games or making pictures. Every day there would be a 15 minute phonics session; the children from both classes were set into three groups depending on their knowledge of phonics, where they would be expected to join in with activities.

On the whole tasks were presented in the Reception as practice, and this is particularly evident with regard to writing. The children were invited to 'have a go' at making books, or writing words in a sentence. Moreover, they were almost always with an adult during writing tasks, which were mainly undertaken in small groups whilst other children were engaged in Mix-up time, which Ms Arthur indicated gave the teachers the opportunity to support the children's efforts at writing at a suitable level for each child. The children were taught strategies for writing – stretching the words (saying them slowly so that they could hear the sounds), and were given tricky words (displayed on the wall) – common words that did not fit phonic patterns. This focus on group activity, practice and 'having a go' suggests that learning in the

Reception was largely viewed in terms of participation (Wood, 2010); the children would learn through taking part in the activities that were devised by the teachers.

Although it was rare for children to be asked to work without being directly supervised by an adult, towards the end of the year Ms Arthur began to give the children short tasks to do on their own or in pairs; for example, having demonstrated the life cycle of a chicken she gave the children a photocopied sheet and asked them to go and draw a life cycle for themselves. On another occasion, the children were asked to work in pairs to record different ways of making the number 10 (bonds). This way of working was described to me as a specific preparation for Year 1 (see above) and can be seen as a move away from a focus on participation in learning activities to a focus on independent production of material for the teacher.

## 4.12 Year One

### 4.121 Term 1 - Ms Hunt

There is a degree of similarity in the way in which work was organised in the Reception and in Year 1. For example both year groups used a thematic approach to planning learning activities as Ms Hunt described in her interview;

“Like light and dark; we chose three main subjects, like RE Science, I can't remember what the other one was - history, Guy Fawkes, so we took those and we just expanded out um and that works really well”(November 2007).

However, this quote reveals a greater emphasis in Year 1 on individual subject areas such as science, history, and geography, commensurate with the way in which the *National Curriculum* was organised. Ms Hunt indicated that efforts had been made to link these subjects together so that there was coherence to the curriculum, making it ‘more meaningful’ for the children. The impression that I got from Ms Hunt was that



she placed a great deal of emphasis on the need for activities to be meaningful for both her and the children. A thematic approach and an emphasis on the importance of meaningful activity would seem to argue that there was a great deal of continuity of practice between the Reception and Year 1. However, the analysis of observations and field notes provide some contradictory data.

Whilst the topics were used as a basis for developing activities there was a much bigger difference in the way that literacy and numeracy activities were organised and presented to the children. During this term there was very little phonics teaching, largely because Ms Hunt did not like it or feel confident teaching it; “I don't see what the children get out of it, because I don't like it I don't teach it well if you see what I mean” (November 2007). From the beginning of Year 1, the predominant emphasis for writing was less on learning letter sounds and more on punctuation with a focus on capital letters and full stops, giving the impression that the children were supposed to know letter sounds. Children were set tasks (such as writing three sentences with capital letters and full-stops), and expected to complete them and the level of support that was given to the children during writing tasks depended on Ms Hunt's evaluation of their abilities and the number of adults that were present in the class. There was, therefore, a significant divergence in approaches to writing between the Reception and Year 1 and a similar divergence in number work as well. Despite Ms Hunt's claim that she wanted to plan with the children, field notes and observations reveal an overriding concern that the children should make progress towards the end of Key Stage attainment targets.

One of the biggest differences between the end of the Reception and the first term of Year 1 was the amount of time that the children were engaged in these kinds of adult directed activities without direct adult supervision compared with sitting on the carpet engaged in whole class activities. In addition to writing sentences children, for example, were asked to colour in Rangoli patterns, to work out what coins were needed to pay for objects and to fill in a sheet of missing numbers which meant that the children spent more time on individual activities. This, coupled with an increased emphasis on outcome- making sure things were correct, meant that the impression of a move away from learning as participation towards an achievement/performance orientation was strengthened.

#### *4.122 Term 2 - Ms Ives*

In the first half of the Spring Term work was organised around the theme of Toy Story II. As in the first term, individual activities were strongly classified according to subject- science, maths, design and technology. However the theme provided strong links between the subjects- for example making a hat for Woody- designing the hat, testing materials for waterproofing, making the hat (although it must be said that this linking was somewhat artificial, because the children all ended up making the hats from a template and covering them in tin foil). The second half of the term was more fragmented. Mornings were devoted to literacy and numeracy. In addition to routine work such as phonic, spelling, handwriting and arithmetic, literacy work was planned around the theme of traditional tales and number work on measuring and money. In the afternoons work was related to a theme based on investigating the local area; making an internet café in the classroom, going for a walk in the park,

drawing and painting houses for a street display, for example, strengthening the classification between literacy and numeracy and other parts of the curriculum (Bernstein 2000).

During this term there seemed to be a return to an emphasis on participation rather than performance/achievement; much of the work was practically oriented and there was quite a large focus on the children working together. An analysis of observations using Bernstein's (2000) model of pedagogic interaction proved illuminating (see appendix D for an example), but also raised some questions. Bernstein tends to ally child-centred pedagogies with weak classification and framing, and teacher dominated pedagogies with strong classification and framing. As might be suspected activities were strongly classified for the most part; the teacher set the parameters of a task and the children undertook it. Tasks, however, could be very clearly stated with little room for the children to make decisions, or they could be quite loosely described and the children could have a great deal of freedom within those parameters to decide how to do it, something that I have associated with Bernstein's notions of framing. For example, on one occasion during a number activity, Ms Hunt told the children 'you have to say it the way that I say it; 1 less than [15] is...' On another occasion the children were asked to devise a ball game in P.E.; Ms Hunt assigned the groups, but after that, her role was that of observer and supervisor- it was the children who took charge of devising the game. Framing in the first instance was very strong, whereas it was weaker in the second example, which suggests strength or weakness is relative rather than either/or. In

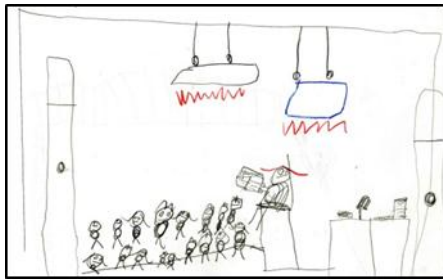
the Reception framing was mostly weaker, and in Year 1 there was more of a mixture of both strongly and weakly framed activities.

In this part of the chapter I have looked closely at the changes that were effected over the transition from the Reception to Year 1. I have argued that these changes are influenced by the change in curriculum and by the teachers' beliefs and views about teaching. I have argued that in the Reception, work was mostly concerned with participation, whereas in the first term of Year 1 there was a change in emphasis to performance, returning more towards participation in the second term. I have also argued that in Year 1, there was a variation in the way that activities were framed either giving children a certain amount of freedom within the parameters of the activity or none at all. In the next part of the chapter I will examine the children's perspectives in relation to these findings.

## **Part 2: Children's thinking about work over the transition from Reception to Year 1.**

When the children were in the Reception they did not often use the word work to describe their activities, aside from glancing references to differentiate teacher led activities from those which were self-chosen. For example, on a tour of the school Poppy pointed out the small hall and told me "We have to do work in here." When I asked her what kind of work they did she replied "Oh Reception stuff. Reception stuff and singing." (July 2007). Pressed further, Poppy talked about doing parachute, P.E., dancing and games, all things that they did as a class under the direction of the teacher. Belinda and Beth also spoke of work. They took a photograph of a chair, and told me that it was where they sat to do work. When I asked them what kind of work

they did in the Reception, they told me “drawing and writing” (July 2002). The girls also talked of doing “special work” on the white board with Ms Arthur. Beth told me proudly “I had a sentence.” referring to the morning, where she had provided a sentence for the class to have a go at writing together on the small whiteboard.



Picture 4.1: Ms Arthur is telling us about ladybirds (George, July 2007)

George and Danny also referred to doing work on the carpet with the teacher. George took a photograph of the class sitting on the carpet, telling me that children were important because

“they are the ones who do work and learn in the school” (July 2002). He illustrated this by drawing a picture of the children sitting and listening to a book about ladybirds (see Picture 4.1). it is apparent from George’s picture that the carpet is focal to his understanding about school and that, in the context of the Reception, he associated the carpet with ideas about work and learning, and in particular the receiving of information.

Although the children did not use the term work very often in the Reception, there is sufficient evidence to support a definition of work as teacher initiated activity (Robson 1993, Wing 1995, Sylva et al. 2004) and that the children understood the work they did with the teacher as both an important and enjoyable part of their school lives. The children’s views at this point also support an understanding of learning as participation, (Sfard 1998, Leinonen et al 2009) of doing things together - The carpet and the small white board, which Ms Arthur used extensively when engaged in whole class teaching activities featured heavily in the photographic evidence and the children took many photographs of displays about what they had

been learning about in school. Belinda and Beth, Tom and Kieran and David and Will, for example, all took photographs of the life cycle of a hen that they had been learning about on the morning I gave them the cameras. They also captured the photo displays of a visit by a farmer with his animals and another of a man with his mini-beast collection. David and Will and Ollie took photographs of paintings and models that they had made of snails and giant millipedes. David and Will also took numerous photographs of the alphabet and number posters that were displayed on the walls. These photographs (amongst others) were all taken in response to my asking the children what they thought was important about school.

When I met up with the children again in the first term of Year 1, the children used the word work to refer to their school activities more often than they had done in the Reception. Moreover, they gave the distinct impression that there had been a change in the way that they perceived work. George, for example told me “It’s quite serious and it’s important that you do your homework.” (October 2007) George’s comment is somewhat different from the way in which he talked about work in the Reception, when his focus was on learning rather than work. Similarly, Poppy and Will also reported a big difference; Poppy told me that it was important to listen and do harder work, and Will that “In Reception we did easy work and now we do harder work” (November 2007). Beth told me about doing hard work in Year 1. George, Danny, Belinda and Kieran also referred to reading harder books. As far as the children were concerned therefore, there was a feeling that they were doing both more work and more difficult work when they went into Year 1.

The children's perceptions resonate with the report by Sanders and her colleagues (2005) into the transition from Reception to Year 1. One of the main findings from this report was that children moving into Year 1 were very conscious of the change in both the amount and difficulty of the work they were asked to do. It is not hard to understand why the children thought in this way; Changes in the organisation and presentation of work activities that I discussed in part one of this chapter indicate an expectation that the children should get on and do work by themselves, and it is this that the children seemed to be referring to when they talked about doing work, and about why it was harder.

The way in which the children talked about work points to a development in their understanding about work between the Reception and Year 1. The impression that I got from the children in the Reception was that work was something that they did with the teacher, and that it was not particularly pressured; they had to listen (Belinda and Beth, Tom and Kieran), and they had to have a go (Danny, Ollie, Poppy). In Year 1, however, the emphasis seemed to change, and they talked about work as something that they did for the teacher, which allies more to a performance/achievement notion of work (Bernstein, 2000). The children's views about work would therefore appear to be heavily influenced by the way in which teaching was organised. Howard's (2010) theories about the relationship between context and children's thinking are useful here; she suggests that there is a situational aspect to children's understandings of work, play and learning, claiming that the way in which teachers interact with children during both play and work has the potential to materially affect the way in which children understand themselves

as learners and situations as learning situations. She further argues that it is important to pay attention to these as it 'increases the pedagogical power to maximise learning opportunities' (Howard 2002: 500). The way in which the children's thinking about work changed over the transition from the Reception to Year 1 would appear to support Howard's contentions.

Parents and siblings also seemed to have an effect on the children's thinking about work in Year 1. From conversations with both the children and with their parents, it transpires that there was an expectation that Year 1 was going to be harder and that it was time to knuckle down and get on with some serious work/learning. Changes to the way in which the children understood work would, therefore, be a significant consequence of the move from the Reception to Year 1. In the next part of this chapter I am going to look more deeply at the way in which the children's feelings about work were influenced by those changes in the way they thought about work.

### **Part 3: Children's Feelings about work in the Reception and Year 1**

I have argued at the beginning of this chapter that, although the change in emphasis from play to work was quite gradual, there are clear differences in the way that work was organised and conceptualised between the Reception and Year 1, with more of the children's time being controlled by the teacher and their choices of activity restricted when they moved into Year 1. The review of literature on transition made links between changes in schooling and changes, both positive and negative, in children's attitudes towards school and learning (Bartholomew and Gustaffson 1997, Galton et al. 1999a, Kohl 1998, Demetriou et al. 2000, Peters 2000, Dunlop 2002, Ofsted 2004, Rudduck 2004, Sanders et al. 2005, Fabian and Dunlop 2007, Fisher,



2009). One of the more concerning issues raised in the report by Sanders and her colleagues (2005) is the waning enthusiasm for school evinced by some children moving from the Reception to Year 1, which may potentially lead to disaffection from school and poor performance (Rudduck 2004). In this part of the chapter I will describe the children's feelings about work in Reception and in Year 1, and explore the links between their feelings and the teaching environment.

#### **4.31: In the Reception**

The impression that I get from most of the children is how comfortable they all seem to be in the school. They wear it like a skin, and they all seem to have a very clear idea of what they are doing.  
(field notes 13/7/07)

This excerpt from my field notes at the beginning of the study is indicative of the confidence that the children displayed in their last term in Reception, both during teaching time and Mix-up time. Ms Arthur also commented on how confident they were as a class, how well they had managed the learning goals in the Reception and how successful she felt the children were as learners within the context of the Reception, particularly contrasted with the class she had had the previous year.

The children too, seemed to be very positive about their learning experiences. When asked about her favourite aspect of school, Poppy told me "Um, because I like to learn. I like learning" (July 2007). Danny, Ollie, and George, also cited learning as one of the more important aspects of coming to school. George was particularly focused on the importance of children learning telling me "they are the ones who do work in the school and learn in the school" (July 2007). It could well be that these children were telling me, as an adult, what I thought they should say was important about school. However, the other children, while they did not talk about learning, took

many photographs that demonstrated their positive feelings about school work in the Reception; of displays, pictures they had made, of the teacher's white board and of the carpet. It therefore seems likely that Poppy was expressing a genuine enjoyment of learning and, overall, the evidence points to the children largely enjoying their work in the Reception.

Whilst the children were generally positive about the Reception, there were one or two areas of discontent. Ollie and Belinda both expressed a dislike of sitting on the carpet for long periods, and Tom complained that he did not like getting told off by the teacher. There were also a couple of occasions where I was conscious of some of the children feeling anxious about an activity. For example, when the children were sent off to draw their own version of the life cycle of a chick, Beth was upset because she was unsure about what she was supposed to do. I also observed David withdrawing from a writing activity on the carpet. At the time, I did not make much of it, but as I got to know him better I came to believe that his lack of confidence about writing at the time caused him to withdraw from the activity to avoid the chance of being chosen to come up and write. These feelings of anxiety about work and the way that Beth and David acted or reacted accord with Dweck's (1999) notion of a helpless reaction to difficulty. Dweck has posited that there are mastery and helpless orientations towards learning; people with mastery orientations tend to react positively towards difficulty and relish a challenge, whereas those with helpless orientation tend to freeze, show signs of anxiety or withdraw from activities when confronted with difficulty. This is something that I will come back to in much greater

detail in Chapter 6 (part 2.2) when I explore the effects of transition on children's learner identities.

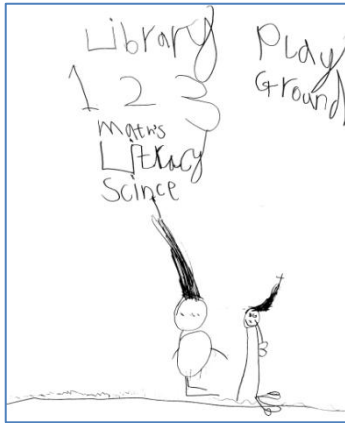
### 4.32 In Year 1

When I met the children again a few months later when they had moved to Year 1 I found that feelings about work in Year 1 work were broadly positive for most of the children who participated in the study. George talked about enjoying learning about new things, Danny about learning Science and Geography. Belinda and Kieran both liked Year 1 work because it made them feel more grown up to do work by themselves. Will told me that he liked the harder work in Year 1 because "it helps you learn more" (November 2007), which implies that he had made a link between hard work and subsequent improvement. On the whole, these children tended to be very focused on their own improvement. As the vignette (below) indicates Danny's experience of the transition from the Reception to Year 1 was very positive.

#### **Danny – a cheeky chappie**

Danny was one of the older boys. He was an only child, and his parents had both been in full time employment until his mother had decided to finish work when Danny was in the Reception. He had been in a private nursery full-time until the term before he began Reception when he joined the school Nursery. He began in the Reception in September. His parents were both from English backgrounds.

Being a boy and learning were the two most dominant aspects of identity that led Danny's actions. Although he was one of the older children, this did not seem to mean a lot to him. His main focus in school was learning. He expressed a preference for 'activities' – particularly science and handwriting (he had quite nice handwriting of which he was very proud). He also talked about reading books so that you could get information from them. He told me that he preferred work to play because "You get better and better at working. Year 1 is better because you concentrate more and get better every day" (November 2007). Danny was also very keen on homework – "because it tells you lots of things to do and helps you learn." He seemed to cope very well with the move to 1. His mother was of the opinion that Danny had gained from the move to Year 1. She felt that, having been at nursery or equivalent since he was six months old, he was benefiting from a more regulated approach to learning.



Picture 4.2: I like doing activities-  
Danny

The picture that Danny drew in the second term of Year 1 (4.2, next page) reveals his perception of the subjects as being separated, although the inclusion of the play ground shows it to be equally important to him. Danny's view of year 1 as being a place where you got 'better and better at working' corresponds with Peters' (2000) research into children starting school in New Zealand.

She argues that some children benefit from a move to a different way of working, where curriculum content is more defined and progress more obvious, and that this can encourage the development of positive learning dispositions. It could be argued, therefore, that a move towards a more structured learning environment is a positive move forward for some children in terms of accelerating their learning. It certainly seems that Danny and his mother were of this opinion. Similarly George, who had a thirst for information, felt that Year 1 was better because "It's more interesting because you get to learn more facts, like Guy Fawkes tried to blow the Houses of Parliament down. Daddy told me." (November '07).

Not all of the children were so positive, however. Some of the younger children in particular experienced a degree of anxiety about their work that had not been so obvious in the Reception. Poppy told me "I got a fright about the work, I just can't tell you" (November '07) (I will look more closely at Poppy's reaction to work in Chapter 6 when I look more closely at the development of attitudes and dispositions). Similarly, Beth and Tom talked about being worried that they could not do their work properly. While David did not tell me that he was worried, it was clear

from his reaction to school at the beginning of Year 1, that he was having difficulty coming to terms with the changes in Year 1. One of the things highlighted in the vignette (below) is David's focus on performance, which showed itself in his concerns about not being able.

**David – a difficult beginning**

Of all the children who took part in the study David exhibited the most extreme anxious response to the move to Year 1. David was one of the younger boys. He was the youngest of 3 children, all of whom were at the school; a brother 2 years above him and a sister a year above that. He had been at the school Nursery and joined the Reception in January. His parents had both worked part time (3 days a week each) until he started full time at school, when his mother changed her hours to fit over 5 days and father went full-time. His parents were both from British backgrounds.

Although he did not mention it to me himself, his mother told me how difficult the first few weeks of the term had been for both him and her;

'I mean this was in the first[half] term um, he was having massive tantrums in the morning and refusing to get dressed and when I did get him dressed he'd then take his clothes off and then he would be crying on the way to school, and stuff and I'd had that for about 4 weeks. ...He's waking up worrying about the fact of whether it's school or not, and I'm sort of saying well it's Sunday so there's no school, he's worrying about the fact that it's school the day after!'

David had also had trouble adjusting to the Reception, and his mother told me that she thought that, like his older sister, he did not cope well with change. She told me that she had made a mistake at first;

'Sort of saying, oh, great, it's the week end and sort of building up the week end too much and sort of making school the sort of evil second part of his life if you know what I mean, so I've tried to be a bit more neutral about it.'

However, she also thought that the move to Year 1 had been particularly difficult for him because of his anxiety about being able to do what he was asked to do.

'Yeh, but I think we are possibly over that now, but I think as well that he feels that he always has said that he can't do the work, he feels like he can't. I mean he hasn't said it recently but he, last (half) term, certainly, and in Reception that was his usual gripe, that was he can't do the work 'I can't do it, I can't do it' I can't read, I can't write, I can't this, and that so he felt that he was not, you know, he could obviously see that the older children could write their names, and he couldn't'.

Whilst it is clear, based on what his mother told me that he had concerns about his performance in the Reception, it would seem that the move to Year 1 exacerbated his anxieties and caused him some distress. The literature states that partnership with parents is a useful way of helping children to manage difficulties over transition

periods (Margetts, 2002, Docket and Perry, 2004, Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al, 2005), and in this case, it appeared to have been successful: the school and David's parents worked together to help David overcome his anxiety. They made him a home school communication book, in which both the teacher and David's parents wrote, and encouraged David to draw pictures about his favourite activities at school.

At the same time, David was receiving what they called 'remedial help' for his difficulties with pencil control, and the teacher had re-introduced time-tabled play sessions. By the time David was comfortable enough with me to talk to me about his school experiences in Year 1, it seemed that he had gained in confidence and it was as if, for him if not for his mother, the trauma of the first few weeks of school did not exist. To me, he was enthusiastic about going to school, citing drawing, being with his friends and playing with the small world animals and the construction equipment as his favourite things to do, which suggests that he was focusing on those parts of school that were not threatening. He told me that he "liked everything" in the class (November 2007) and by the second term he was talking to me enthusiastically about how much he enjoyed writing; a far cry from the anxious child at the beginning of the year. David may have been putting forward a positive image of himself for my benefit, or that of other children who were with us at the time. However, observations demonstrate that he also appeared happy to have a go at teacher directed activities; joining in much more with carpet activities than he had done in the Reception, and having a go at drawing and writing, which suggests that his anxieties about aspects of school life had lessened considerably.

There is a concern that abrupt transitions from one way of working to another can lead to dips in performance and consequent feelings of failure and disaffection that have the potential to remain with children during their school careers (Bartholomew 1997, Galton et al. 1999a, Margetts 2002, Yeboah 2002). Others argue that anxieties about change and being able to perform might not in themselves lead to poor transitions. Although it may be initially traumatic, properly supported, change can be a catalyst for development (Dockett and Perry 2001, Dunlop and Fabian 2007, Fabian 2002, Peters 2000, Podmore et al. 2000). David is a particularly good example of the way in which, when properly supported, changes can stimulate development (See insert above). In the Reception he had not been particularly interested in writing or drawing, saying that he was not very good at it. However, once he had overcome his initial anxieties in Year 1 (with some targeted help), he cited writing and drawing amongst favourite activities (from conversation March 2008).

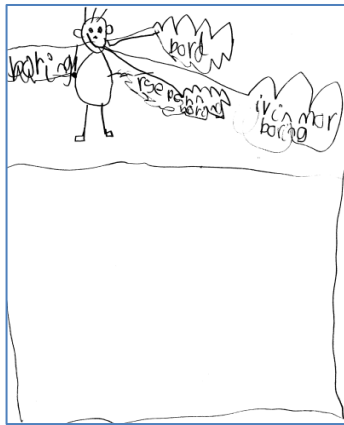
It is possible that David's increasing confidence at school was influenced by his thinking about the way he participated in learning activities. From conversations with his mother and from observing David in the classroom and talking to him it seems that his focus had switched from being anxious about getting things right, and had moved to thinking, like Danny, George, Belinda, Will and Kieran, about having a go and getting better as he went on. These children, independent of their relative experience and ability, were happy to have a go, do what they called their best and were confident that they were getting better all the time, which suggests they were more in tune with ideas about learning as acquisition and participation than they were with about achievement and performance. Any initial anxiety that any of them

may have felt was soon overcome, lending credence to the findings of Sanders and her colleagues (2005) that while children might suffer from anxiety about the changes in working practices, it is a transitory emotion that passes as the children become accustomed to new ways of working. In their report the team argued that transition should be seen as a process of adaptation. When children move from one learning context to another, there is a period where they learn to adapt; there may be some initial worries but they 'soon get used to it' (Peters 2000, Sanders et al. 2005). This is akin to Dunlop's notions of 'transitions capital', where children are prepared for and able to cope with periods of uncertainty as they learn new ways of being in the classroom (Dunlop 2007). On the surface, the findings from this study are somewhat similar. Indeed Beth told me that she was worried at first because she did not put gaps between her words, but that she had got used to it, so it was better now. However, thinking about transition in terms of 'getting used to it' is not particularly useful, because it does not help to understand how the children adapted to the changes, nor does it give any attention to how they felt about the changes, or how the changes affected the way in which they thought about themselves as learners. There were some children, such as Tom and Beth, who, although they might be said to have 'got used' to the changes, persisted in feeling anxious about certain aspects of school work, particularly writing, something that I will look at in more detail in Chapter 6 (part 2.2).

There was one child, who without giving any appearance of anxiety, expressed feelings of hostility to school from the onset of Year 1; feelings of discontent that were directed particularly towards work. Ollie told me at the beginning of Year 1 "I



hate learning. My dad is smarter than the teacher. I hate learning at school. The



Picture 4.3: 'Bord, boring, ivin more boring' (Ollie)

teacher doesn't know like my dad knows" (November 2007). His expression of dislike is in contrast to what he told me in the Reception, when he said "you learn a lot in school" (July 2007). This hostile attitude towards school was maintained throughout the year (see vignette below) Although Ollie's feelings about the teacher may have had some influence on his

attitude to school, it was school work that Ollie focused on as being the greatest source of discontent, as this picture (4.3 left) shows. Asked to draw a picture of the carpet, he drew a large blank space, and then himself standing next to it, commenting on how boring it was. The fact that he was not sitting on the carpet is, I believe, indicative of the lack of enthusiasm that he had for this aspect of his school life.

#### **Ollie- biggest and smartest**

Ollie was one of the older boys. He had been at the school Nursery and moved into the Reception in September. He had a twin brother who was in the parallel class. His father worked in a professional capacity and his mother cared for the children full-time. His mother came from a British background, and his father from Australia.

Ollie was the only child who told me that he didn't like school from the beginning of Year 1, telling me that it was boring. His mother told me that he had loved the Reception because he really liked Ms Arthurs, but he was less keen on Ms Hunt; 'he absolutely adored school in Reception. Absolutely was just – in his element almost. He was learning things; he was getting to know things, exactly what you've just said about being right about things and being happy. Yeh, so he absolutely loved it. Complete change when he went into Year 1.' She talked about him being reluctant to come to school at times although she was more concerned with Ollie's twin in the parallel class whose reaction to the beginning of Year 1 was very similar to the way that David's mother described his. Ollie's mother told me that since Ms Ives had come to the school he was gradually beginning to become more engaged with school and enjoy it again.

Despite Ollie's mother's feeling that he was becoming more reconciled to school in the second term with the change of teacher this attitude was maintained throughout the time that I was working with the children. Throughout Year 1 he persisted on telling me that the work was boring, and that being with his friends and being able to play were the only good things about being in school. Unfortunately, and despite my best efforts, he refused to elaborate on why it was boring but observations of him at work show that he was often doing things differently from the other children. For example, when asked to count in fives to 100, he (and Danny) carried on counting to 150. On another occasion when asked to take one from different numbers he (again with Danny) took away 2, or 3 or 5. It is therefore possible that he was bored by a lack of intellectual challenge that was coupled with a change in the amount of time that he was expected to do work. A mismatch between children's level of ability and what is being taught is put forward by Ofsted (2004) as one of the reasons why the transition from the Reception to Year 1 might be problematic. As I have argued in the previous chapter, however (section 3.22), this reductionist view tends to ignore a large proportion of children's school experiences. In Ollie's case, it may well be an important factor in his dislike of school, but, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, his resentment may also be a product of resentment about over prescription (see Chapter 5 part 2.1).

It is also possible that Ollie was influenced by the attitudes of his parents and his twin brother, who, as I mentioned in the vignette above, had a very difficult beginning to the year. As Brooker (2008) argues, parental influence would appear to be a factor in the children's attitudes towards school. As Ollie was the only child who

was openly discontented at the beginning of Year 1, so his mother was one of the few parents to openly criticise the school for what she felt was a lack of academic rigour, although she claimed that she did not speak of it in front of the children. Similarly, David's mother (above) noted that it was her change of tactic that helped David to settle more easily into Year 1. These two are the most obvious examples of the influence that parents have on their children's attitudes to school, especially at first.

Having said that parental attitudes influenced the children's responses at the beginning of the year there is some disquieting evidence of a certain amount of ambivalence towards schoolwork after the initial pleasure at doing new things had worn off. Belinda and George, for example, began to show signs of dissatisfaction, particularly towards the end of Year 1 as George explained to me:

George: I'm more glad that I'm out here with you because in there I would be, oh, three plus three is six.

SH: Why do you find maths boring? Is it because you find it too ....

George: I do too much and Ms Ives says so tens and units. I'm really really good at maths but I'm just bored because we keep doing it over and over again and Adam says boring and I agree and I think it's quite boring.

SH: So Adam says what you think?

George: And Ms Ives says 'yeh I know but we have to do it'.

(June 2008)

There are several points of interest in this conversation, not least the acknowledgement that talking to me was more fun than being in the classroom, or that Ms Ives acknowledged the repetitive nature of the curriculum. However, what was of particular interest for me was the waning enthusiasm for school work that George displayed. This is of particular concern and is echoed in White and Sharp's (2007) article that states there is a disquieting change in some children's views about

learning and school when they go into Year 1 as this vignette of George's experience of the transition illustrates:

**George – a passion for information**

George was an older boy; he was the eldest of 3 children and had joined the school in the Reception in January. He had previously been in a Reception Class at a private school. His parents were both employed in professional capacities and he and his siblings were cared for by a nanny out of school hours. His sister joined the Nursery when he began Year 1,

George's most defining feature was his enthusiasm for learning new things and sharing them with anyone who would listen. At weekends and during holidays his parents told me that they took him to museums, particularly anything to do with flying, as that was his abiding interest. Whilst they were pleased with George's progress in reading and writing at the school they told me that it was sometimes a struggle to get him to come as he often complained of being bored. George's initial response to the transition from Reception to Year 1 was very positive as he was looking forward to learning new things. However, as the year progressed, he became noticeably more disengaged from the classroom and complained to me of boredom on more than one occasion.

During the second term observations show that George was beginning to demonstrate signs of resistance; joking and making silly faces during individual/group work, and delaying coming to sit on the carpet until explicitly directed by the teacher as this excerpt from an observation taken in March 2008 shows:

(Prior to this excerpt the children have been measuring 'worms' (bits of string), using rulers to see which is the longest)

Ms Ives has come up to the group and they have the long piece of string. She asks them how they can measure the string accurately. George has his ruler in his hand. He puts it at the end of the other ruler which is on the string. Ms Ives says, "That is very clever George." He looks at her and smiles. He gathers a handful of strings and begins laying them down, comparing the length and placing them in order. Ms Ives claps and asks the children to freeze saying, "Who is frozen like an ice-cream?" George does not look at her, and carries on placing the pieces of string in order. She asks them to put the string away and then come and sit on the carpet. George sighs and starts picking up the string. After a minute Ms Ives asks the children to come and sit down on the carpet. She begins counting slowly back from 5. By the time she gets to 0 all the other children are sat on the carpet. George is still walking around the classroom moving things from one place to another. Ms Ives says "George, come and sit down now. When I get to zero I expect everyone to be sat down on the carpet no matter what! Come and sit down." He walks slowly over to the carpet and sits down at the back.

George's resistance, although relatively mild, stood out in a class that was noted for its conformity during times when they were under the direct supervision of the teacher (particularly carpet time). He was not the only child to express dissatisfaction, however; Belinda told me "I like the toilets because I'm not bored in the toilets" (March 2008), which suggests that the toilets were a place where she could relax away from supervision and, concomitantly, that the classroom was not only less than stimulating, but a place where she felt she had to behave in a certain way that increased her feelings of boredom. Both Belinda's and George's parents felt that their children had had a very successful Reception Year were very positive about school and the importance of conforming to the teachers' expectations. Children's perspectives about behaviour will be explored in much more detail in chapter 6 (part 2.1) when I discuss the role of pupil identity in the transition to Year 1

The ambivalent attitudes that some children developed over the year, may well be linked to the different ways in which the curriculum was structured in Year 1. There were some teacher initiated activities that were viewed very positively by most of the children (with the exception of Ollie, who thought everything was boring except play time), and others that increasingly became a cause for complaint. I will begin by describing those activities that the children viewed as positive, and then go on to look at those that they complained about. I will then go on to explore possible reasons for the children's expressed preferences and place these findings within the context of literature surrounding children's views of school and transition.

As might be expected, different children displayed positive and negative attitudes towards different aspects of their school work, some of which can be linked to their

perceived abilities. Poppy and Will particularly enjoyed maths, because they thought they were good at it, and were confident that knew what to do, whereas Tom and Lena did not like writing because they didn't think they were very good at it. Kieran, David, and Beth (properly supported) both liked writing, because they enjoyed stories. This evidence is consistent with the findings from previous studies (Pollard et al. 2000, Sanders et al 2005) that make associations with children's abilities and their enjoyment of certain school subjects. However, what I am most concerned about in this part of the chapter is the children's positive and negative reactions to certain teaching practices, rather than their personal preferences for one subject over another. What is remarkable is that, given the disparity in children's interests, there is a high degree of convergence about the kinds of work activities that the children enjoyed and those that they did not.

There were three aspects of work that the children expressed positive feelings for. The first might be what Danny described as activities. Activities could be attributed to any area of the curriculum, such as P.E. science, maths, or art, or they could be attributed to a specific topic, such as fairy stories. For example, during one P.E. session, the children were asked to work in groups to create a catching game using a small ball. On another occasion the children were asked to find out which was the class's favourite Toy Story character. After one literacy session, where the children had been acting out fairy stories using props, Poppy told me she wanted to talk to me, because there was something she wanted to tell me. She told me how much she had enjoyed the morning's work and that "I like being in the classroom, now I think it's better," (February 2008).

What these activities, and other activities that the children expressed preferences for, had in common was that whilst the teacher initiated the activity, there was an opportunity for the children to control the direction of the activity, either as a group or as an individual. By having that control, they could manipulate the task in a way that was meaningful for them, thus increasing their enjoyment. Wood (2010), describes this form of activity as a playful approach to work, on the play/work continuum, and her ideas are something that I want to take up in more detail in Chapter 5, when I come to look at children's perspectives on play. For the moment I will focus more closely on activity.

One of the main precepts of early years' pedagogy is the central place of children as active learners (See chapter 3). Observations of the children in various situations show just how much they welcomed opportunities to move about and to take control of the activities that were set for them, in ways that are consistent with a learner-centred curriculum and pedagogy (Brehony 2005). In the examples I cited above the children showed excitement and enjoyment whilst engaged in activities that had been planned for them, but which gave them a certain amount of control.

The children also enjoyed work that accorded with their interests. For example the work based around the Disney Movie Toy Story two was very popular with several of the children – Tom, Kieran, David, Lena, Beth and Will all took photographs of the displays, talked enthusiastically about the project and showed evidence of engagement in the activities that were planned around the topic:

The teacher gave them a booklet that had been cut out in the shape of Woody, and asked the children to draw and colour a picture of Woody on the front cover. She told them that they were going to be using the booklets for their literacy work over

the next couple of days and that they were going to be put up on the board outside and so they should try really hard to do a good job. She demonstrated what she was expecting them to do, and then they got on with it. I was watching David whilst he was drawing his picture. He spent a great deal of time and effort – more than I have ever seen him do before- on drawing Woody's face in the shape and then colouring in his shirt and jeans. It was quite a contrast from the beginning of last term when he coloured red all over his rangoli pattern in about half a minute.

(field notes, January 2008)

This evidence from my field notes shows how David's enthusiasm for the subject (he told me later that he really liked Toy Story 2) was a powerful motivating factor for him. There were many other examples from different children of how an activity that was based on something that was meaningful to them and that they liked meant that they were more likely to become deeply involved.

Interestingly, another aspect of work that the children seemed to enjoy was of a much more routine nature. Many of the children appeared to enjoy work such as handwriting, practising number bonds and phonic blends. Routine work like this tended to be fairly short in duration, very focused on a particular theme, and thought of as practice rather than performance. Pollard and Triggs (2000) claim that children of low ability enjoy this kind of work because it is both easily understood and easily achievable. However, it also seemed to me that the children were more relaxed when they perceived an activity as practice, because the pressure to perform or to get things right was not so evident.

Whilst work such as activities and routine practice were thought of positively, the children were not quite so receptive to other teacher initiated activities. One of their main sources of dissatisfaction was the amount of time that they spent sitting on the carpet. A large proportion of the children's time, both in the Reception and in Year 1 was spent in sitting on the carpet. Both Ollie and Belinda said that they did not like



sitting on the carpet in the Reception, but it was not until the second and third terms in Year 1 that it began to become a cause for comment by the majority of the children: Will told me “It's such like boring, because we have to sit on the carpet for a long time. About 10 hundred seconds”, (May 2008) Beth that “It's quite boring because you have to sit there and wait and listen what you have to do and then you have to go off and do what you have to do, like some kind of literacy or...” (March 2008) and Tom that “[I]t's rubbish, because all you have to do is sit on the carpet and listen to the teacher and you don't get to talk to each other.” (May 2008) These extracts from conversations with some of the children are fairly indicative of the whole group. The main complaints that the children seemed to have was that carpet time was boring, that all they had to do was listen to the teacher, and that it was uncomfortable to sit for a long time.

Whilst the children did complain that it was uncomfortable to be sat cross legged for



Picture 4.4: 'You can't talk to each other on the carpet' (Tom)

a long period of time, some close analysis of observations would seem to suggest that it is not so much the amount of time that the children spent sitting on the carpet that is the issue but what happened on the carpet. As I said in the first part of the chapter, the carpet was used for a variety of purposes, including administration (taking of register), as well as whole class teaching, and playing games.

The focus of the children's complaints was generally that all they had to do on the carpet was listen to the teacher. This picture that Tom drew of himself (4.4 left)

sitting on the carpet is, I believe, indicative of the frustration that he felt in having to sit still and quiet for long periods of time, and he was not the only child to express this frustration. The children appeared to be much happier and more relaxed during carpet times when they were involved in discussions, such as working out how to measure something, and show and tell, or being involved in doing things on the carpet such as making words with letter sounds, listening to stories and playing games rather than listening to a set of instructions, explanations or answering closed questions.

In their reports on the transition from Reception to Year 1 both Ofsted (2004) and Sanders et al (2005) criticise the amount of time that children in Year 1 spent sitting on the carpet as excessive. The evidence from my study leads me to concur with their findings. However, rather than lacking the physical, emotional and intellectual capacity to manage to sit for more than a short period of time that the Ofsted report implies, the children in this study could, and regularly did, sit for periods in excess of half an hour at a time without overt signs of distress. What is in question is not the children's capacity to sit still, but the educational value of them doing so. It has been argued that carpet time has been established more and more in infant classes in particular as sites for whole class teaching, but that many Year 1 teachers find whole class teaching in Year 1 classes of questionable efficacy, and a product of the top down pressures of inspection regimes and the *Primary Framework* (Fisher 2010). The evidence from the children would seem to suggest that they got little out of whole class teaching that involved large amounts of teacher dominated talk, finding it boring and disengaging.

There was another aspect of work that the children did not seem to enjoy very much, and that was work that was not routine, but work that involved following explicit instructions. While there were some examples of this kind of work in the Reception, it increased by a large margin in Year 1. Some examples of this kind of work would be drawing three pictures and writing a sentence underneath each one, giving change from 10p, or making different amounts using coins. These kinds of activities are differentiated from the activities that the children enjoyed and that I described above, by the amount of control that the teacher exercised over the outcome.

What seemed to have a great deal of influence on the children's feelings about work, therefore, is the extent to which they were actively involved in the setting the parameters of work. Not just in terms of doing, but the extent to which they could make decisions about the work that they did. It appears that the children associated more explicitly directed outcomes with notions of performance that had the potential to lead to the kinds of anxiety and/or boredom that I have discussed in this part of the chapter; anxiety because some children were concerned they might not be able to do it properly, and boredom because some children could accomplish it all too easily. Other work, where the outcome was more ambiguous, was more likely to be talked of and approached in a more relaxed manner by all the children.

## Summary

What came across most strongly in the analysis of children's feelings about work in the Reception and in Year 1 was their decided preference for work that involved their active participation in decision making. It can be seen from the children's views

of work in Year 1 that they showed a distinct preference for 'activities' as Danny called them, and for those activities where they had opportunities to interpret the task and make some kind of individual response. Activities that were tightly controlled by the teachers were more likely to be subverted in some form or other, to be thought of as boring, or be productive of anxiety, especially amongst children who were more likely to judge their performance in relation to others rather than concentrating on their own improvement. The move from the Reception to Year 1 signalled an increase in those tightly controlled teacher directed tasks that gained negative reactions from the children.

## Chapter 5: Perspectives on play over the transition from Reception to Year 1

This chapter follows from the previous chapter on children's thinking about work. One of the major discontinuities between the Foundation stage and Key Stage 1 is the place of play in the curriculum. In the previous chapter I defined work as those activities that children were required to do by an adult. In this chapter play refers to those activities that the children chose to do. During the Foundation Stage, play is explicitly cited as an important part of the learning process. The *CGFS* (QCA 2000), for example, placed a great deal of emphasis on play as a part of the planned curriculum. Play does not have the same stature within later state schooling in England, where importance is placed more on what rather than how children learn (QCA, 1999), and the role of autonomy and choice in children's learning is therefore at the discretion of the teachers.

In the previous chapter I noted that the journey through the Reception and into Year 1 was articulated by Ms Arthur and Ms Hunt as a gradual shift from a play-based learner-centred curriculum to a teacher-directed content-based curriculum. The evidence from my observations and field notes would seem to support this as the time available for the children to engage in self-directed activities within the classroom diminished substantially between the first and second terms in Year 1 and the role of play in the curriculum changed. In this chapter, I want to explore in some detail the children's perceptions of the role of play in school, in their learning and in the way in which they expressed their identity in school, and any changes in understandings that came about as a result of the transition. However, it is not only

the way in which children's perspectives change that needs to be examined, but the effect that these changed views have on children's thinking about and attitudes towards school. As Dixon (1989) points out, young children do not tend to openly display negative feelings about school and are rarely directly antagonistic, perhaps because of their powerless and dependent position in school (Barrett 1989, Mayall 2002). Nevertheless, the early years of school have been cited as a particularly important time for setting children's attitudes towards learning and towards school in general. It is therefore important to be able to explore in detail the relationship between play and children's attitudes towards school and learning.

The chapter will be divided into three parts. The first part of the chapter will give some background details as to the teachers' use of play in the curriculum. In the second part of the chapter I will look at how the children's thinking about play was affected by the changes that they experienced over the transition to Year 1, with particular reference to the way that children thought about play as a part of their learning experiences in school. In the third part of the chapter I will look at the way in which the changes affected the children's feelings about school, and explore what it was that the children valued about play.

## **Part 1: Play in Reception and Year 1 – Teachers' perspectives and organisation**

### **5.11 Reception- Ms Arthur**

The evidence for this section is taken in part from my field notes and also from the photographs that the children and I took. In the Reception, Mix-up time happened at least once a day and usually twice, morning and afternoon, and for varying lengths of

time. During Mix-up time the children from both classes had free access to the nursery, outdoor area, play room (see below) and one of the classrooms. There were usually at least three adults, including one of the class teachers, supervising the areas. The outdoor area was equipped with climbing frame (out of action when I was there), wheeled toys, tyres, a large sand-pit and a raised area shaped like a boat with a sail/canopy. There were also planters and hedgerows and the children had access to equipment such as magnifying glasses and inspection jars and to one end of the playground there was a fenced off area that was used for ball games.

Most of the children took photographs of the play room, which was a large room divided from Windlesham class by a folding partition. The children had access to mark making and modelling materials and there was a space that was used for construction or for musical instruments. When I visited the school in the Reception, there was a role play area that was set up as a travel agency to support the topic on journeys. Of the children who took part in the research only Poppy and Kieran did not take photographs of this area, although the children seemed to be as interested in the photographs of different places that were displayed on the 'shop' as they were in how it was to be used. In one classroom there was a sand tray and a water tray in the other. In each classroom there were also spaces at mid-height for small world toys such as a farm or Polly Pocket dolls. This was also quite a popular subject for photographs, particularly with the younger boys and girls.

Ms Arthur placed a great deal of emphasis on the value of play as a tool for learning, particularly social learning:

[M]ix-up time works because it allows them (the children) to make independent choices. It allows them to move freely between Nursery and Reception, so where they feel they need to be. It gives them, obviously, access to outdoors (yeah), um, I

think it's a good way of developing friendships and confidence, and allowing them to lead their own learning you know, providing, you've provided the resources and the activities for them to learn, you know, (yeah), but then they are able to move their own learning on as well independently, (yeah) which is nice.  
(Interview with Ms Arthur Nov 2007)

The rhetoric of independent choices and the provision of resources to support children's interests can be seen as an endorsement of a child-centred approach to curriculum that was also evident in Ms Arthur's use of terms such as schema and tuning into children's interests. Moreover, her comments reveal a quite different perspective on learning in relation to play or Mix-up time to the didactic approach to phonics and number teaching that I witnessed during teaching time (see chapter 5). During Mix-up time classification and framing (Bernstein 2000) was weak: the children were expected to lead their own learning, to follow their own interests and to regulate their own behaviour, unless asked to work with an adult.

It is difficult, given the limited amount of time that I spent in the Reception, to extrapolate how much play was regarded as an integral part of the curriculum, and how much it was used as a means of occupying some children whilst the teachers worked with others (Wood and Attfield 2005). During Mix-up time, I saw very little interaction between the adults and the children – in fact most of the time the adults seemed to be grouped together talking. At the same time, the play room in particular was set up with equipment to support the topic on Journeys – an example of a planned play environment advocated by the *CGFS* (QCA 2000). There is also anecdotal evidence from both Ms Arthur and Ollie that the children's interests, observed in their play, were used as a tool for planning, which is evidence of a more integrated approach to play and learning (Wood 2010). It must also be remembered that my visits were in the last few weeks of the summer term, when there seemed to



be a relaxation of the timetable, and it is not necessarily representative of the whole of the Reception year. It may well be that the teachers were focussing more on didactic methods during these last few weeks of the term to help prepare the children for Year 1, and Mix-up time was becoming more associated with relaxation and enjoyment- a point that I will return to later in the chapter.

### **5.12 Year 1 – Ms Hunt**

In Year 1 the space designated for play was more restricted. There was a space outside the classrooms that was equipped with shelves for a shop, a home corner space with cooker, fridge, tables and chairs, an open space for construction or small world toys, a dressing up rail with character costumes, a sand tray with tools and an easel for drawing/chalking. The space also had some large tables that had drawing and cutting equipment permanently supplied. There was no provision for planned outdoor play and the children had access to the main playground only at specified school play times. Again this seems to be fairly typical of the changes that occur in schools once the children move into Year 1 (Sanders et al, 2005). Like the play room in the Reception this was a very popular subject for the children's photographs at the beginning of Year 1.

Evidence from my field notes, observations and the interview with Ms Hunt reveal that a modified form of Mix-up time was used in the first term of Year 1. Twice a week, when there was a teaching assistant in the class, the teacher would work with small groups of children on either literacy or numeracy activities and the other children were given a choice of activity depending on the teacher's focus.

Although I did not see any evidence of observation during my visits, Ms Hunt was a big advocate of this form of assessment, claiming that they were “much more meaningful” for the children than other forms of assessment.

Like Ms Arthur, Ms Hunt’s interview data about Mix-up time championed a child-centred approach to learning during Mix-up time, giving children opportunities to exercise choice and using their interests to plan for their learning although her interview data suggests a somewhat different approach from the Reception:

If it's Golden time the children choose. If it's Mix-up time I choose and it's based on, like I put sand out one week for hand writing, because I noticed a lot of children needed to do pattern work so mostly done through observation and it's often with me it's done by, oh I noticed that so and so, oh they were learning the months of the year in one lesson, so I put that out with white boards ... and Hannah likes writing on white boards and that is an activity that she will go to and I've noticed that she kept sitting on her own, so I used that observation in a positive way to encourage her to have a go at an activity and invite her friends. And then, like, when we were doing capacity it was like yes you can have the sand with all the pots because that will marry up with the vocabulary that we are learning in our classwork .  
(From Interview with Ms Hunt, Dec '07)

In the Reception the children had free access to a much wider range of resources, activities and spaces during Mix-up time. Therefore, although the children were having opportunities to choose, these were much more limited than they had been in the Reception. Moreover, whereas Ms Arthur seemed more concerned with the use of Mix-up time to promote children’s own interests, Ms Hunt seemed to imply much more influence over the choice and selection of activities to promote specific skills. It was in this term also that the concept of Golden time was introduced. As the quote from Ms Hunt indicates, golden time was differentiated from mix up time in terms of both choice and learning objectives. The control that Ms Hunt claimed over the choice of materials for Mix-up time revealed much more emphasis on learning objectives that she devised, particularly with regard to literacy and numeracy.

The way that Ms Hunt organised Mix-up time is indicative of the contradictory nature of her feelings about teaching young children. Whilst the above quote suggests that she wanted to take a degree of control over the children's choices during Mix-up time, evidence from my field notes suggests a more laissez-faire approach commensurate with a developmental view of young children's learning; 'Ms Hunt commented to me that they were still at the exploratory stage and so she was happy to let them get on and do what they wanted with the activities that were available' (from field notes, Nov '07). It is the use of the term 'exploratory stage' that implies a developmental understanding of children's learning and, while it was present in Ms Arthurs' talk in the use of terms such as schema, was subsumed by the focus on children making choices and leading their own learning. Taken with Ms Hunt's talk about work in Year 1 (see chapter 4.121), there are signs that Ms Hunt held a deficit view of young children as learners not being ready for more formal teaching rather than championing their position as active agents in the learning process.

As well as Mix-up time the children were given opportunities for free play. Free play differed from Mix-up time as there were few restrictions (except for time, space and resources) on what the children could do during those times. During these free play sessions the children could choose from any of the resources that were available in the classroom, or, if there was another adult available, limited numbers of children could go out into the play area. There was very little interaction, either observational or interventional, on the part of the teacher or teaching assistants. At the beginning of the term this was usually limited to Golden time on a Friday afternoon. As the

term progressed, however, the children were given more opportunities for free play. Quite often the reasons given would be that “they have been working hard this morning”, or “I am having trouble downloading my planning from my home computer” (from field notes, Nov 07).

It is important to differentiate between Mix-up time and Golden time (or free play) because they are founded on very different understandings about the place of play in schools. Mix-up time, with its focus on planning for children’s choices and interests, formed part of the curriculum and was seen as a legitimate and valued learning arena. Golden time or free play on the other hand was viewed as an opportunity for the children to relax from the hard work that they had been doing over the week, or to give Ms Hunt an opportunity to catch up on her planning. Ms Hunt’s evidence, taken with the evidence from the previous chapter does seem somewhat contradictory, and may be indicative of the tensions between different pedagogical understandings that cause difficulties for teachers in the early years of school (Wood 2010). The use of play in this way, however, is not linked to any kind of pedagogical philosophy, but more to a sense of the children needing time off, which can only be attributed to a lack of faith in children’s readiness to cope with a whole days’ teacher directed learning, poor time management, or concerns about the need for evidence of planning over children’s learning.

### **5.13 Year 1 - Ms Ives**

When I visited the children in the second term of Year 1 there was a noticeable diminution in the amount of time that was allocated for free choice of activity, which was generally restricted to school play times and Golden time on a Friday afternoon.

There was, moreover, a significant difference in Ms Ives' approach to Golden time. On the wall near the carpet was a chart with Golden time and a pouch next to it with numbers going up in 5's. The children were able to 'earn' up to 20 minutes of Golden time through good behaviour over the rest of the week. This is yet another departure in the way that play was used in the classroom; although it was still seen as a time for relaxation, it was also used as part of the reward structure. This change in emphasis from play as part of the learning environment to play as a regulatory tool has implications for children's understandings about play, as I shall discuss in part three of this chapter.

Play was not only used as part of the reward structure. In the second half of term 2 Ms Ives introduced a role play area in to the classroom, set up as an internet café to support a topic on the local area. Her rationale for this was that it would help a particular child who she believed had not settled into Year 1 very well. Like Ms Hunt, it would seem that Ms Ives was using play in this context to support a child who was having difficulties; something that I have argued is a deficit understanding of the use of play. I will discuss the introduction of the café and the children's responses to it in more detail in part two, but from what I witnessed, they were only allowed to access the role play area very occasionally.

There is evidence of different understandings about the use of play in school throughout the Reception and both the first and second terms of Year 1. In the Reception there was evidence of planning for play, largely in the resources that were made available for the children to use, and Ms Arthur's belief in the importance of children making choices to direct their own learning. In both the first and second

terms of Year 1 it seems that structured play activities were provided mainly to support curriculum subjects for children who were having difficulty coping with the more formal approaches in Year 1, rather than promoting the children's own interests (although there is some evidence (see part two below) that on rare occasions, the teachers would pick up on the children's activities and plan around them). The transition between Reception and Year 1, therefore, signified both a change in understandings about and a change in the amount of time that was given over to child directed as opposed to teacher directed activities. There is also, as with their views on work a strongly developmental strain to the Year 1 teachers' thinking about play. It was those children who were not able to access the curriculum who "still needed to play" (Ms Hunt, from field notes November 2007). The children's evidence, however, provides a much more complex picture of the associations between play and learning.

## **Part 2: Children's perspectives on play in the Reception and Year 1**

This part of the chapter is an exploration of how the children involved in the study thought about play, what they valued about it and how the changes between Reception and Year 1 affected their thinking about play and learning in school. In this section, I will discuss how the children used play in school, and what play meant to them. During the analysis of the children's talk about play I identified several themes that were of varying importance to the children: self direction, interest, relationships and enjoyment. I will take each of these themes in turn and explore them through an exploration of what the children said about play, supplemented by an analysis of their drawings and photographs and observations that I took of them during play.

### 5.21 'I can do what I want to do': The importance of self-direction

One of the main themes that came from the analysis of the children's talk about play was how much they valued opportunities to be able to decide for themselves:

Lena: I play with my show and tell which is my panda today and I don't think that it is Mix-up time or Golden time today but I like Golden time and Mix-up time.

SH: do you, what do you like about Golden time and Mix-up time?

Lena: you can do ever what you like.

(from conversation with Lena, March 2008)

Ollie: Well when you finish your work and you still have some time, you can do free time. Next [photograph].

SH: I was just going to ask you about that. Is free time boring and Golden time boring?

Ollie: No, that is the only thing exciting.

SH: is it? So why is that different from doing the other stuff?

Ollie: Because then I get to do what I want instead of just work.

(from conversation with Ollie, March 2008)

As these extracts from conversations that I had with Ollie and Lena show, both children found play much more congenial than work, and articulated it in terms of being able to do what they wanted to do. Partially this preference may have to do with the lack of enjoyment that both children expressed about their work, either because it was too difficult (Lena) or because it was too easy (Ollie). However, as opportunities for play became curtailed in Year 1, all of the children mentioned being able to choose several times as a reason for them preferring play. A desire for self-direction was also apparent in some children's attitudes towards work that I explored in the previous chapter, and may be seen as evidence of children's wish to be seen as active agents within the learning process (see Part 3). The responses that these children gave would appear to be fairly typical; previous research projects into children's views of schools also emphasise the importance that many children place

on being able to make autonomous choices in the classroom context (Newman 1997, Pollard et al. 2000, Burke and Grosvenor 2003, Flutter and Rudduck 2004, Robinson and Fielding 2007).

The evidence from this study alongside comparable evidence from similar studies with children of all ages reinforces the idea that children have a desire for autonomy, or self-direction. Deci & Ryan (2002) claim that this desire is an innate characteristic that drives human perception. However much of early years' education in the UK is premised on an understanding that young children should be allowed to make choices about their learning and the value of children's self-initiated activities as a vehicle for learning is widely advocated (Bruce 1997, QCA 2000, Sylva et al. 2004). In the Reception, these children were given many opportunities for self-direction, and therefore they were used to a classroom discourse that included such opportunities. It may, therefore, be a part of what Carr & Claxton describe as the cumulative effect that pedagogy has on 'individuals' tendencies to respond to, interpret and construct learning opportunities in certain ways, strengthening some of these ways and weakening others' (2004: p95). Carr & Claxton maintain that learning environments influence the way in which children are able to see themselves as learners, and that these environments can enable children to be independent, or can lead to dependence, something that echoes Howard's (2002) views about the importance of tailoring the learning environment to promote children's understandings of learning through both work and play.

The snippets of conversation I noted above would seem to imply that both Ollie and Lena were identifying themselves as people who were both capable and desirous of



making choices about what they did in school. In other words they understood themselves as autonomous individuals. The different ways in which Ollie responded to activities he had chosen for himself (see observation below) and activities he was required to do by the teacher would further seem to support the idea that his experiences in the Nursery and Reception had helped him to develop an understanding of school as a place where his active involvement was understood as a meaningful contribution to the learning process.

This observation took place in the first term of Year 1 during a Mix-up session. Ms Hunt is working with a group in the classroom and Ms Jones (assistant teacher) is in the play area playing with a group of children. I have followed Ollie out into the play area:

Ollie joins a group of children who are sitting at a table with small white boards. They are writing big numbers down on their boards (100 etc.). Someone says to me I know what 100 and 100 is. It's 200. We have a conversation about adding big numbers. I ask what is 1000 and 1000. They say 2000. Ollie writes  $600 + 700$  on his board and then writes  $= 1300$ .

(Observation of Ollie Nov 2007)

What is particularly interesting about this episode is that the cognitive effort was definitely greater than anything that I had seen them doing as a part of the numeracy curriculum, and it also generated more excitement than anything I had witnessed in the classroom. I got the feeling that they were on the brink of an exciting discovery. This example is indicative of Ollie's identity as a learner independent of the teacher/adult; he and his peers were developing their understanding of how numbers work. Whilst there was some adult input in developing the concept further, the impetus came from the children rather than from the adult.

Whether a desire for autonomy is innate or constructed through participation in culture, the gradual changes in pedagogy from the Reception to Year 1, where there were fewer opportunities for self-directed activities, accentuated rather than diminished expressions of desire from the children for some form of control over their learning. What is particularly interesting is the contrast between Ollie's reactions in this play situation and his responses during the work activities that I detailed in the previous chapter. It appears to be a difference in orientation between process and performance. When he was involved in activities set by the teacher he seemed to be much more focused on the performative aspects of his efforts. During Mix-up time this pressure to perform seemed to be lifted somewhat and his desire to be seen as clever manifested itself more in trying to go further with an idea. It seemed to me that during this number play Ollie was able to develop ideas without having any worries about getting things wrong and he was consequently more relaxed. This is something that I intend to explore further in chapter 6 when I look at children's perspectives on identity.

This rare episode from the second term of Year 1 further exemplifies the point;

The café (taken from field notes March 2008)

When I walked in this morning Ms Ives was putting some of the home corner from the outside play area into the corner of the classroom. She said that they were going to be doing the local area for their topic, and that she wanted to make a café, or something like that for role play. She said that it was particularly to help Adam, because she felt that he needed something like this to help him. ...

After the [writing] assessment was over Ms Ives told them that they could have some free time because they had worked so hard. Quite a lot of them made a bee-line for the 'café'. What I found really interesting was that David went and got a scrap piece of paper and wrote a 'menu' for the café. It is as though they really know what to do in this sort of situation. Ms Ives told him what a good idea that was and he almost glowed with pride.

I was quite excited myself about the role play area - especially because it showed just how much this kind of thing means to many of the children. I really wish that

Adam was part of my study as he is so interesting. He is the one who seems to articulate what it is that the other children are thinking.

They did not have a great deal of free time, only about 15 minutes or so. When Ms Ives told the children that they had to stop he was really cross – he started shouting “No, no, no, I want to play”.

George came up to him and said – “listen Adam, if we do our work really well, then we will be able to play again.” which just shows how he associates free play with reward for good behaviour. I think it may show that while teachers may value role play etc. as good educational practice, the children on the other hand have not made that association, and see it more as relaxation, as freedom from work, and a chance to do what they want to do rather than what the teacher tells them to do.

Does this mean that if we value play as adults then we need to make that obvious to children- we need to articulate it. I think Ms Ives did a bit when she praised David for coming up with the idea of a menu. In the afternoon Ms Ives picked up on David’s ideas, providing the children with some blank menus and asking them to draw pictures and write the cost of the items down. She also picked up on Adam’s interest in Remy from Ratatouille, who he had brought in for show and tell. She decided to call the café ‘Remy’s book café’ and got some of the children to design posters to advertise it.

There are several things that I found interesting when reading this extract from my field notes. The first is the alacrity with which David took on a lead role in making the café part of the classroom. When I talked to him about it afterwards, he was very happy about the introduction of the café, telling me that it was his idea to write the menus. David’s actions show an understanding of role play as part of a learning context, and one in which he was able to contribute to developing an agenda.

Talking to the children involved in the study and observing them both in the classroom and in the playground and reflecting on this episode in the light of other episodes, I realised that my initial reflections were somewhat skewed. It was clear that the children set a great deal of store in being able to take control both during play and in work. For example, just after the Café was introduced into the classroom, Poppy came up to me and said “I need to talk to you this afternoon. Have you got your recorder?” I told her that I had, and that we would meet that afternoon. When we met that afternoon she told me “I really like being in the classroom now I think

it's better" (from conversation with Poppy, March 2008). Other children expressed similar feelings, talking about how they could make things in the café. It is also clear to me that if adults value play as a vehicle for learning then they need to more than just articulate it, but use it fully as a valuable part of the learning curriculum, and not just as a way of helping some children to cope with the demands of the taught curriculum.

The episode with the cafe might be thought of as an example of what Wood (2010) calls an integrated approach to play and work that she argues is a more effective pedagogical approach than the play/work divide that is so common in schools (Bennett et al. 1997, Adams et al. 2004, Wood and Attfield 2005), and the evidence from this study does point to (most of) the children's enthusiasm and engagement in developing ideas about what to do. The number play that Ollie and his peers engaged in, for example, would also have been a useful starting point for planning activities that built on what the children knew and were thinking about at the time. However, because there was no adult other than myself to witness it there was no link between what they had been exploring and the taught curriculum and therefore the divide remained and Ollie continued to be bored by his school work. Whilst the café was very successful, opportunities to use it were all too rare, and it was used more as a reward for good behaviour than it was as a part of the learning curriculum. I will explore the effects of this change in the way that play was used in more detail in Part 3.

The children's perspectives on choice did not seem to change much between the Reception and Year 1, but it is possible that they became more conscious of their

desire to choose once play became more restricted in the second term of Year 1. Certainly, when the children were in the Reception, they did not articulate their desire for self-direction, but that is possibly because choice was built into the curriculum in such a way as it formed part of the daily routine of the classroom, and therefore a part of their lived realities (Howard 2002, Dahl 1995). A cautionary word about developing elaborate scenarios needs to be made however; not all of the children were keen on the theme of a café. Tom was patently uninterested in the idea of a café and thought it was “rubbish”. He was much more interested in building jet engines with Lego or playing families in the sand. Whilst it may be useful to use role play as a part of the learning curriculum, if children’s interests are a valued part of the learning experience, then opportunities for them to pursue their own interests independent of any particular theme may be important, as I shall explore in the next section.

### 5.22 ‘I like to do dinosaur stuff’: the importance of interest

The importance that the children placed on play does not only highlight a desire for self-regulation. As well as valuing opportunities to make decisions about what they did, several of the children valued play time because it gave them the opportunity to work on things they were interested in. As I mentioned before, Tom was keen on jet planes: he would build them out of Lego and hide



Picture 5.1: 'this is me playing dinosaurs with Aaron' (David)

them behind toy boxes so that they would not be broken up. Once, when I had asked him to take some pictures about things that were important to him, he asked me to

take a picture of him drawing a jet plane. When I asked him why it was important to him, he told me “because I always wanted to draw jet planes and now I can,” (from interview with Tom March ’08). Similarly David had a particular interest in dinosaurs and spent much of his play time both in and outside the classroom involved in games about dinosaurs; the picture he produced (above), which is one of the most detailed pictures that he made for me, shows him smiling and playing with his friend in a shared activity (March 2008). Tom and David can be seen as having learning goals and interests that were different from the topic work that was planned by the teacher, and play gave them the opportunity to focus on them.

Not all of the children’s learning goals were quite so obvious, however, nor would they be easily assimilated into a ‘programme of study’. This point is supported by Maddock (2006) who found in her research that children’s learning goals do not necessarily conform to adult understandings of learning. She argues that adults tend to focus on academic learning, and literacy and numeracy in particular. Children’s learning goals, however, can be as much social as they are academic. Poppy is a prime example of this kind of social goal, of the exploration of relationships and of social structures as the vignette (below) shows.

**Poppy – a grown up girl**

Poppy was one of the younger girls. She had been in a Nursery in another school, and then had moved into the school Nursery the term before she started the Reception in January. She was the eldest of two children, with a younger brother who began in the Nursery when she entered Year 1. Her father worked in a professional capacity and her mother cared for the children full-time. Poppy’s parents both came from British backgrounds.

In the Reception Poppy appeared to be very enthusiastic about school, telling me that she ‘loved learning’. She was a little more guarded when she went into Year 1. Poppy’s mother told me “she was more engaged by the Reception” and that “they learned lots”. Poppy’s mother also told me that although Poppy appeared to be very confident if she knew what she was doing, she was much less so if she did not feel as though she could. Similarly, Poppy told me in Year 1 that she liked doing work if it was easy.

As well as declaring an interest in school learning in the Reception, Poppy's play, and the photographs she took showed a fascination with what adults did when she was at school. In the Reception she took photographs of the staff in the office and talked about their work. In Year 1, Poppy told me that she would much rather be at home than at school, something that her mother agreed with. During play times I would often see her in the play area outside Year 1 playing in the café. At these times it did not appear that she was particularly interested in playing with other children. She would play happily by herself, co-opting other children when their interests coincided with hers, and ignoring them when they didn't. For example at one point, when she was 'playing' with Susie, Poppy dropped Susie off at school and then ignored her completely whilst she went and ordered food from Nisha at the café. When Susie (understandably frustrated at being thrust into the role of child without having any real part in Poppy's play) came up to Poppy as she was sitting with her coffee, Poppy turned around to her and told her that school wasn't finished yet and she had to go back while Poppy finished her coffee. When Susie gave up waiting and went to find someone else to play with Poppy barely noticed. On another occasion Poppy was seen using a book as a lap-top when she was sitting in the café in the classroom.

The kind of interest that Poppy demonstrated is very hard for adults to perceive without the kind of close attention that regular observation permits and equally difficult to make provision for as a part of the curriculum; although Ms Ives did encourage Poppy and a friend to make a computer out of a cardboard box for what became the internet café, Poppy was not really interested in the computer per se, but more in how adults spent their days whilst she was at school. Opportunities for play allowed Poppy to focus her attention on these ideas that do not hold any resonance for teachers (Maddock 2006).

For some children of the children a major factor in their enjoyment of and involvement in school was being able to follow their own interests both in Reception and in Year 1. This was especially true of David, Lena and to a certain extent, Poppy. Evidence from observations and from a conversation with his mother would seem to imply that David's interests often superseded his desire for companionship. I quite often saw him playing happily by himself, and he was one of the few children who would opt to talk to me later if he was involved in something. Allowing David opportunities to engage with his own projects helped to reconcile him to school at

the beginning of Year 1. Moreover, where school interests coincided with his own – as in Toy Story and the café - his engagement and enthusiasm was high, both increasing his confidence and spilling over into other areas of his school life.

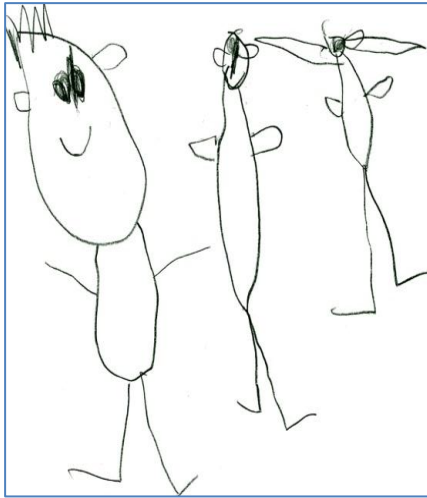
There is a contrast between the way in which children such as Beth, David, Lena and Tom reacted to teacher directed activities (as I described in the previous chapter) and how they approached activities that they had chosen for themselves in the attitude that they had towards this learning experience. The way in which the children approached self-chosen activities is in tune with a mastery approach to learning that has been identified as being an important part of developing positive learner identities (Dowling 2000, Dweck 1999, Pollard and Filer 1996). In following their own learning goals they were confident, relaxed and involved in ways that sometimes eluded them when trying to follow the teachers' agenda.

### **5.23 'I like playing with my friends' - the importance of relationships**

Social goals; developing friendships with peers and relationships with adults, were also of great concern to the children, both in the Reception and in Year 1, and the vehicle for cultivating peer relationships was play. In the Reception in particular, play with friends was probably the most prominent feature of their conversations, drawings and photographs, and was the most common response to the question "What is your favourite thing about school?" This drawing by Will (next page) is typical of the drawings that the children produced at my request, characterised by smiles and a focus on activity such as playing football, climbing or playing chase. There were also many photographs of children playing together in both the outside area and in the play room. Belinda, Beth and Kieran also took photographs of their



‘special friends’; children that they liked to spend time with. For some children, such



Picture 5.2: I like playing football with my friends (Will)

as Lena and Danny, social play formed an important part of their learning goals, often spilling over into work time, especially when play time became restricted, or when they were less engaged in the activities that had been planned for them. For some children, and particularly Lena (see vignette below), the development of friendships was the most important part of her

school life.

#### **Lena- a focus on friendship**

Lena was one of the younger girls. She joined the school in the final term of the Reception, having previously been at kindergarten in Poland (where children begin school at 7). She was the elder of two children, having a sister who was three years younger. Her mother cared for the children full time and her father worked full time as a photographer. Her parents were both from Polish Backgrounds.

Lena’s father told me that she had settled in very well at the school both in the last term of the Reception and in Year 1. He told me ‘I want for her to speak English well and to be happy’, and that his main priority was for her to make friends and have fun; ‘She is young still, she will learn reading and writing in time’, he told me. He also told me that she was happy to go to school in the Reception and in Year 1 because she really liked the teachers.

Lena’s goals were almost exclusively social. She had arrived late in the final term of the Reception and she spoke Polish at home and was learning English at school; one of only two children in the class for whom English was not the first language. Developing relationships with other children and with the teachers was high on her list of priorities. Her photographs and drawings (see fig.4) were almost exclusively about friends and playtimes and in conversations with me she would talk about the games that she played with other children in the class. In the second term of Year 1 Lena found the lack of Mix-up time particularly difficult to come to terms with, especially because she was having difficulty in developing a positive relationship with Ms Ives, her new teacher. She told me that she liked Ms Hunt better because we “never ever get to have Mix-up time now we have Ms Ives.”

In the literature on transition, friendship - either going to school with friends, or making friends - is something that was highlighted as being an important factor in successful transition to school (Ledger et al. 2000, Margetts 2002, Peters 2003).

Lena, new to the school at the end of the Reception year, was just beginning to develop friendships, and play was important because it meant that she could spend time with children she wanted to be friends with (Abby and Carla) in a way that she could not during work time because her lack of experience in English and her newness to the English school system meant that



Picture 5.3: "I like playing with my friends" (Lena)

she was grouped with children with whom she rarely interacted outside of class time. The detail, care and attention Lena gave to the drawing that she produced in Year 1 in response to my question, 'what is your best thing about being in school?' could well be a testament to the importance that Lena placed on friendships in school (5.3 above right).

In the Reception play/Mix-up time was recognised as an important space for children to work on their friendships and relationships with their peers as the quote from Ms Arthur at the beginning of this chapter revealed. In Year 1 friendships were also ostensibly seen as important; there was a friendship table set up to one side of the classroom which both Poppy and Belinda photographed as being important to them, "because, um, when Cherry comes up and says I don't want to play, we go to the friendship table" (Belinda, March 2008), but there were fewer opportunities for the children to use it, and it was often covered in models that the children had made, or books. Although Sanders and her colleagues (2005) state that friendships do not seem to be quite so important during the transition from Reception to Year 1 than they might be when transferring from one institution to another and the children's

talk in Year 1 tended to focus less on social play and more on choice, observational evidence shows little difference in the children's interest in social play between the Reception and Year 1. It may well be that although they do not focus on friendships in quite the same way as they might when being with relative strangers, friendships are of high importance to children at all times and not just during transition periods. Losing time for play meant that they missed opportunities to spend time with their friends.

### 5.25 We get to have fun: the importance of enjoyment



Picture 5.4: "I like playing with my friends best" (George)

As well as examining the children's feelings about play in a learning context, it must also be acknowledged that as far as the children were concerned play was, quite simply, enjoyable. In the Reception, the children took many photographs of other children running around the outside play area, which appeared to be the most popular place

in the Foundation Unit. The drawing by George (left) of children on the climbing frame with big smiles on their faces could be interpreted as a representation of the feelings of fun and freedom that he experienced whilst playing with his friends. Again, there was little change in the children's feelings about fun play when they moved into Year 1, just complaints that they did not get enough of it. According to Poppy and Belinda play time, and especially outdoor play time, was an opportunity to relax and to have fun. In this sense, play did have a therapeutic quality for the children; it was a relief from the stress and anxiety that people like Tom and Beth felt

about tackling teacher led activities such as writing, and the boredom that Belinda, George and Ollie experienced whilst working well within their capabilities.

### **Part 3: 'We don't get to play as much': the move to Year 1**

Thus far I have been concerned with exploring the children's feelings about play in school and the way in which they expressed their identity through play activities. I have examined four main reasons that the children gave for preferring play: being able to make choices, following their own interests, developing relationships and having fun. I have argued that, although they might have different priorities, all of the children placed a high value on play. I have also argued that, for the majority of the children, a preference for play over work remained quite constant over the move from Reception to Year 1. In this section, I want to explore further how the children's understandings about play were affected by the changing contexts they experienced over the time that I spent with them, and the consequent effects on their understandings of themselves in school.

The contextual nature of children's thinking that I discussed in the previous chapter about work accords with the view of children as being active interpreters of their worlds (Clark et al. 2005). Any change in environment, therefore, calls for a re-evaluation of the way in which the children interact with it. There is little doubt that these children (and children from similar studies) continued to place a high value on play. However, the evidence suggests that their understandings about the place of play in school may have become somewhat more ambiguous. The children's changing understandings about play reveal not only the discontinuity of discourse in the use of play between the Reception and Year 1, but also the extent to which

children's thinking is influenced by context (Turner 1995, Day and Kington 2008). In part 1 of this chapter I argued that classroom based play in Year 1 increasingly became something that the children could earn through good behaviour rather than something that they did as a matter of course. As the place of play in the learning discourse was weakened over the transition to Key Stage 1, so its part in the regulatory discourse was strengthened. That is not to say that it was not part of the disciplinary structure in Reception; Beth and Belinda talked about missing Mix-up in the Reception "if you are naughty", but that more importance was placed on play as learning.

This observation took place on a Friday morning after the children had had a numeracy lesson. They are now sitting on the carpet. Ms Ives told them they only have 10 minutes of Golden time so they needed to earn some more. She will be watching them as they are listening to the story Ms Walker is going to read and she will see if they can earn 5 more minutes of Golden time.

10:06 Poppy is sitting with her hand on her knees. Anna knocks her and she turns away.

10:08 Poppy looks intently at Ms Walker and sits very still with her hands folded in her lap looking at the book.

10:10 Ms Walker is reading from the book. Poppy sits quite still. She moves her head to look at the globe and then moves it back to look at the book.

10:12 Poppy is still sitting cross legged. She shifts her position slightly and then looks back to the book

10:14 The story is coming to an end. Ms Ives says that was worth 5 minutes of Golden time, and Poppy stretches.

(Observation of Poppy, March '08)

In this observation the teacher is explicitly using the children's desire for play as a regulatory tool. If the children will sit still and listen quietly to the story then they will be allowed to do more of something that they like doing. It is hard to attribute Poppy's stillness entirely to a desire to earn play time, because it seemed to me that she enjoyed stories and she was invariably quiet when being read to. However, as I sat watching with the class, there seemed to be a qualitative difference to the way in which the children sat to listen to the story. Further comments that other children

made at times (see George's comment to Adam re the café, above, and the talk with David, Will and Tom below) about being able to play if they were good, reinforce how well they understood the changing understanding of the place of play in school.

I am reminded somewhat of Dahl's (1995:127) observation that 'children's perspectives [...] reflected what they lived each day in school, [and] what was valued by their teacher'. Dahl's point reflects the way in which the children understood and assimilated the changing context of play between the Reception and Year 1. It does not, however, do justice to the rapidity with which they both assimilated the change and then used that understanding to serve their own ends. Being good, or conforming to adult wishes, in this context became a strategic action (Pollard and Filer 1999) in that it allowed them to get something that they wanted, as this excerpt from a conversation that I had with Will, Tom and David demonstrates.

I have asked David, Tom and Will if they would mind coming to talk to me. I want to ask them about carpet time. They come willingly to sit outside with me in the play area. Tom sits down but looks at the sand tray.

Tom: I want the sand.

SH: Why do you want the sand?

Tom: I want to play with sand.

SH: You would like to play with the sand would you? Well like I said, maybe if it's Golden time, because you've got Golden time this afternoon, if I asked Miss F we can come out here and we can play with sand

Tom: Yeahhh!!!

SH: Shhh, but you can't play now

Will: If we be good

SH: But...

Will: if we be really good.

We talk about sitting on the carpet for a short while and the children draw pictures

David: I'm done!

SH: You're done, ok. Thank you. I tell you what boys, because you have been really helpful, ok you can have 5 minutes in the sand

Will: Yes!!

We go over to the sand tray and lift off the lid. The boys immediately start filling pots with sand and stirring them around.

SH: Tell me about the sand

Tom: It's really fun

Will: yeah, it's really fun

David: That's it.

SH: that's it, it's really fun? I don't get what's really fun about it.

David: because you can play...

(from conversation with Will, Tom and David, March 2008)

In this excerpt the children, particularly Will, are demonstrating their awareness of the way in which play is used as a reward for appropriate behaviour. It forms part of the negotiation between teacher and children that allows school learning to take place (Willes 1983, Woods 1990). As can be seen from the above excerpt, it is also, I am ashamed to say, a strategy that I used as a part of the negotiation between myself and the children within the context of my trying to obtain what I thought of as usable data, and is indicative of my difficulties with disengaging from my identity as a teacher. However, using play as a reward does nothing to promote an understanding of play as part of the learning process; there is a possibility that the connection between play and learning is attenuated if the children perceive that their play activities do not make a contribution to their education and consequentially play may become regarded more as a recreational activity rather than one that contributes to learning (Howard 2010), which may have negative consequences for some children's attitudes towards school.

## Summary

In this chapter I began by looking at what the children said about and did during play periods. I have argued that play has an enormous value for children for a number of reasons: because they enjoy being able to exercise autonomy and take risks in their learning without threat; because it gives them opportunities to follow their own interests; because it gives them opportunities to be with their friends and because it is enjoyable and therefore engaging. I also argued that the way in which the teachers

used play had a big influence on the children's thinking, and that the increasing use of play as a reward for good behaviour and reduced amount of time that was available for the children to play meant that the potential that play has within the learning context was diminished and the fun/relaxing aspects accentuated. These findings reinforce the notion that there is a situational aspect to understandings of play within education (Howard, 2008), and that if play is to be used as a medium for learning then it is important for adults to highlight the learning potential of play.

In both this chapter and in Chapter 4 I have dealt particularly with the ways in which children's thinking about work and play and their role in learning were affected by the move from the Reception to Year 1. The gradual nature of the shift between a play based curriculum and a content based curriculum does not seem to make much difference to the children's views about play, but does reveal their extraordinary sensitivity to the differing approaches of the teachers. In the next chapter, I want to look more closely at understandings of identity and disposition and the impact that these may have on children's thinking in the move from Reception to Year 1.



## **Chapter 6: Perspectives on identity in the transition from Reception to Year 1**

### **Introduction**

This chapter refers specifically to the questions regarding the effects of the transition on children's perspectives on identity within the context of school. In Chapter 2 I explored the links between transition and identity based on the idea that identity is neither fixed nor does it reside purely in the individual but is influenced by social understandings of social groups (Kowalski 2007, Lawler 2008). I also explored the notion that local identities are produced within institutions (Merry 2007) and that the different identities that exist between different institutions (or parts of institution) form cultural boundaries (Seung Lam 2009).

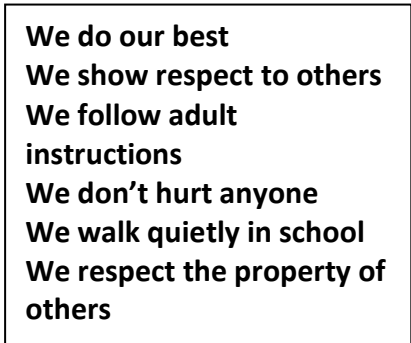
The evidence from previous studies into the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 suggests that children have particularly associated the move to Year 1 with ideas about growing up (maturity) (Sanders et al 2005). However, there are other aspects of identity such as pupil identity and learner identity that are also influenced by the transition because of the different conceptions of children as learners that apply in each setting (Dunlop 2002) (see chapter 3 Part 2). I will begin by looking at similarities and differences in the way in which children were conceptualised in the Reception and Year 1 using evidence from field notes and interviews with teachers and parents. I will then go on to examine the children's perspectives on identity and the relationship between the changing contexts of the Reception and Year 1.

## Part 1: Social identity production in the Reception and Year 1

This part of the chapter is concerned with the way in which the school and the teachers set up particular understandings of identity within the school and over the transition from the Reception to Year 1. I am going to look particularly at three aspects of identity, as they were those that came across as being of importance to the children and centre on notions of being good (pupil identity), being a good learner and being grown up. Because of the drawn out nature of the transition from a Foundation Stage curriculum to a more content centred curriculum it makes sense to take each of these in turn and to see how notions that were set up in the Reception were carried over or changed in Year 1. I will also examine the links that were made between these particular aspects of identity.

### 6.11 – Pupil Identity

The evidence from observations, field notes and interviews suggests that there was a great deal of emphasis in both the Reception and in Year 1 on ensuring that the children understood appropriate behaviour in school. The few written rules that



**We do our best**  
**We show respect to others**  
**We follow adult**  
**instructions**  
**We don't hurt anyone**  
**We walk quietly in school**  
**We respect the property of**  
**others**

**Fig 6.1 School rules displayed on Reception classroom wall**

Winterbourne School had were prominently placed on the white board in the Reception classroom, with translations into more child-friendly language alongside- 'We do what grown-ups in the school tell us to do.' 'We look after things' (see insert, left). As well as the official school rules photographic evidence (taken by me) also shows that the Reception class had an additional set of carpet rules or conventions that were explicitly and imperatively stated: 'Listen; Cross your legs; Put your hand up',

The nomination of these rules as school rules implies that they were aimed at children as a part of a specific social group – as pupils in the school, and relates to understandings of social identity in the way that certain characteristics, embodied in the rules, are ascribed to a social group and to individual members of that group (Cigman, 2001, Kowalski 2007, Merry 2007) and to the way that the social identity of pupil is differentiated from other identities of childhood (Willes 1983, Dunlop 2002, Ellis 2002), which further reinforces the view that identities are not fixed, but dependent on context (Pollard and Filer 1999; Hughes 2004). The way in which the rules were translated for children in the Reception demonstrates how they were further categorised as little ones with limited understanding. I am not making any judgements as to whether this view of children was apposite, but merely seeking to show how children were understood in relation to the school and Reception. Next to the rules was a series of consequences for infringing them – starting with a warning and ending with being sent to the head teacher. As well as consequences for breaking school rules there was a system of rewards through house points. The use of consequences and rewards supports Mayall's (2002) claim that children have very little room for negotiation within a school context.

Observations of children (and by default the teachers) in all three terms point to a great deal of time spent by the teachers in reinforcing these rules and conventions. On the whole the teachers had similar, behaviourist, approaches to managing the children's behaviour. Audio and visual cues seemed to be particularly popular; for example, each of them had a device that they used to signal when they wanted all the children's attention. Ms Arthur had a little bell, Ms Hunt a fairy wand that made

a tinkling noise when a button was pressed and Ms Ives used a clapping rhythm that she expected the children to repeat. Similarly house point stickers and ticks were used to reward compliance. Both Ms Hunt and Ms Ives were fairly consistent in this behaviourist approach, although Ms Ives tended to be rather more positive. Ms Arthur on the other hand showed some understanding of children as active agents. Observations and field notes, for example note that she reminded the children of rules and talked about them making good and bad choices. However, given that her interpretation of good and bad choices was for the children to conform to the rules laid out for them, and it was reinforced by the rewards/sanctions policy in the school, this approach confirmed a particular pupil identity – good pupils made good choices (i.e. conformed to the rules) and naughty pupils did not.

The emphasis that the teachers placed on stating and reinforcing appropriate behaviour, is indicative of Willes' (1983) contention that the early part of schooling is dominated by inducting children into a particular set of behaviours appropriate to school life. The evidence also supports a link between children's willingness to conform to rules and teachers' understandings of their readiness for school (Ellis 2002a). In her research *'Firm Foundations; A Survey of ATL members Working in the Foundation Stage'*, Ellis argues that Year 1 teachers claimed children were less ready for Year 1 than they had been before the introduction of the Foundation Stage, because they were 'less ready to sit on the carpet'. Ms Arthur's understanding of the children's readiness for Year 1 is, in part, associated with their willingness to conform. Similarly, Ms Hunt's and Ms Ives' assessment of a particular child (not a part of this study), as being less ready for Year 1 was mainly to do with his

unwillingness to do as they asked him. It is worth mentioning, because, as I shall argue when I come to look at the children's perceptions in Part 2, showing that an awareness of the rules was an important priority for them.

## 6.12 Maturity

In the Reception behaviour was also linked to maturity. In this example from my field notes (below) Ms Arthur is equating the children's conformity – i.e. doing what she wants them to do with being grown up and sensible.

It was Sports day so the children came in ready in their house colours. There were some straight running races and then two relay races for the whole class. The children were given stickers for being 1st, 2nd or 3rd in their races. Actually they got lots of stickers, because the Year 5 children in charge of the stickers gave them out freely. Ms Arthur told [the children] that the Year 5 children had been very silly and they had given out the stickers when they shouldn't have, and now there were not enough stickers for the children in Years 1 and 2 who were having their Sports day that afternoon. She asked the children if they would mind giving some of the stickers back – five each. As the children were giving back the stickers she praised them all, gave each of them 5 house points and said how sensible and grown up they were being, not like the silly children in Year 5.  
(field notes, July 2007)

In her interview she also talked about joking with the children and saying how grown up they were and ready to go off to Year 1, because they were so clever. Even joking, Ms Arthur is setting up an understanding for the children of what it means to be grown up and ready to move on to Year 1, which accords with Merry's (2007) contention that understandings of identity can be locally produced and create expectations for children in the process of transition from one class to another

Whilst growing up was an explicit part of the discourse in the Reception, it was less so in Year 1. Although both Ms Hunt and Ms Ives talked to me about the children's ages, it was more about reminding themselves that the children were still quite young, and that their ability to manage the demands of the school curriculum was

quite limited. However, there was a difference in the way that the Year 1 teachers understood the children's limitations. Ms Hunt talked about the children still needing to explore, which suggests that she is working from the developmental perspective that is, according to Bennett et al. (1999), pervasive in early childhood education and relates to the children's proficiency with abstract thinking. Ms Ives, on the other hand, told me "I think that they get very tired and, you know, it's a lot for them still really. I forget as well as a teacher, you know, some of them are only five and I expect them to be able to go on forever." (from interview, May 2008). Although there is a developmental aspect to this statement with regard to young children's capacity to cope with a lot of 'work', it suggests that Ms Ives is more concerned about the children's stamina and is appreciative of the effort required in learning rather than thinking from a cognitive perspective.

### 6.13 Learners

I have argued throughout this thesis that there are links between the way in which children are constructed as learners and pedagogical practices. In this chapter I want to concentrate more on the way in which the teachers' views about the children as learners were also associated with their views about the children growing up. As I stated in chapter 4, towards the end of the Reception the children were expected to take on more and more work independently. This was something that Ms Arthur identified as a tension, telling me "Well it's that constant struggle, isn't it, of um, there's not enough adults, really" (July 2007). It seems likely that Ms Arthur was expressing a belief that the children lacked either the maturity or the skills to be able to manage challenging teacher directed activities without adult support. Part of the

move from Foundation Stage style learning to Key Stage 1 style learning was an increase in the amount of time that the children spent undertaking tasks set by the teacher independently which sets up the potential to link the ability to take on those tasks successfully with growing up. Interestingly, it was this aspect of the transition that Ms Arthur was less sure about. There was a big contrast between the Reception and Year 1, where the expectation was that children in Year 1 should be able to listen to the teacher's instructions and demonstrations and then go and work independently (such as going and writing three sentences with full-stops and capital letters). Only those children who were less able should need support, which has some major implications, not just for children's learner identities, but for their pupil and personal identities too, as I shall discuss in part two of this chapter.

In this part of the chapter I have pointed out how understandings of growing up, being a good pupil and being a good learner were linked to produce changes in social identity over the transition from the Reception to Year 1. There are parallels here with Seung-Lam's (2009) ideas about cultural boundaries that children have to cross when they move into a new setting – that meanings change from one context to another, something that Mayall (2002) also reflects upon when she claims that the way in which groups are characterised varies from one context to another. There are also other aspects of identity, such as gender and culture, that children have learned through interactions in the home and wider social context that have been identified as being important to young children's developing sense of self (Brooker 2002, Kowalski 2007) and during times of transition (Jackson and Warin 2000, Podmore et al. 2003, Dockett and Perry 2006) and therefore these influences will also need to be

taken into account when discussing children's perspectives on identity. However, without underestimating the importance of either ethnicity or gender in identity production, in the next part of the chapter I am going to argue that the locally produced aspects of social identity regarding ideas about maturity, pupilhood and learning were significant factors in shaping the children's understandings of the transition to Year 1.

## **Part 2: The children's perspectives**

Based upon the analysis of the children's data that highlighted certain aspects of identity as being of particular importance during the transition to Key Stage 1 this part of the chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will explore the children's perspectives in relation to being a good pupil based on the importance that they seemed to place on this aspect of their school lives. The second section will examine their perspectives on being learners and the third will look at the interplay between ideas about being a good pupil, being a learner and growing up.

### **6.21 Being a good pupil**

What I found fascinating about this class of children was how outwardly conforming to the school rules and teachers' expectations of behaviour they were; not just the children who were involved in the study, but all but one child in the class, evidence of the importance that the children placed on rules. All of the participating children at some point in their one to one conversations with me mentioned the rules. For example, George told me

Well, everybody has to behave nicely when they are in school. They have to follow the school rules ... it's more grown up when you are in Year 1. It's quite serious and



... and you do what you are told to do. If your teacher tells you that you have to do something then you have to do it.  
(from conversation with George October 2007)

Similarly, in the Reception and in Year 1 the children stressed the importance of “Not running down the corridor” (Will, July 2007) and “Sitting down nicely, being straight in the line” (Tom, March 2008). These comments from the children demonstrate a regard for rules as being an important part of school life. It was not just a question of knowing the rules however; the children also placed a great deal of emphasis on being able to follow them.

The way that the children connected being good with the ability to understand and follow the rules is indicative of the power of the regulative discourse (Bernstein, 2000). For example, as well as talking seriously about the rules Beth and Tom also asked me to take photographs of them ‘sitting nicely’ on the carpet, ‘lining up sensibly at the door’ (Tom) or walking in the corridor (Beth). Observations also provide evidence of the importance that the children placed on showing how well they could behave. Although one or two of them described themselves as silly (Tom, Ollie), cheeky (Danny) or funny (Belinda, David) being naughty was something that other children were, not them. At this early stage in their school career, this particular class had a reputation for being very well behaved, and they worked hard at maintaining that reputation, managing not only their own behaviour but that of other children as well, even when they were bored and uncomfortable as when they had been spending a long time sitting on the carpet (see chapter 4).

There was very little difference between the way that the children talked about the rules in Reception and Year 1, which matches the consistency between the

behaviourist techniques that the teachers employed and may go some way to explain why the children were so keen to be seen to conform to the rules. Any slight differences in approach that the teachers might have had (see Part 1 above) were very quickly assimilated and acted upon, as I shall discuss in the next section. However, the children's talk about themselves in relation to the rules reveals different motivations for their apparent conformity that had some effects on the way in which they acted in Year 1 as I shall endeavour to explain in the next few paragraphs.

#### *6.211 Being good is a good thing – Beth and Kieran*

Both Beth and Kieran placed a great deal of emphasis on being good because they wanted to be good. For Beth, being good was about both conforming to expectations and about understanding the rules.

##### **Beth-** a very good girl

Beth was one of the younger girls in the class and younger sister of John who was in year 3 when she was in Year 1. Her parents both worked full time and they had a nanny who cared for them when the parents were at work. Beth had attended the school Nursery and had started in the Reception class in January. Her parents were both English.

Beth told me that she was quite shy at first when she was in the Reception, something that was confirmed by her mother. When I met her, she did not appear to be shy and was happy to talk to me with Belinda. Beth reported feeling quite scared when she went into Year 1. She was worried that she did not know the teacher, and that she was doing her writing wrong. Her mother told me that while Beth seemed to be very sociable outside of school she had suffered a 'crisis of confidence' when she entered the Reception and had been extremely shy. She also felt that Beth had had quite a shaky beginning to Year 1, being 'reticent going into school' and not joining in with the activities. When I spoke to Beth after the first half term of Year 1, she told me that she was used to it, because she now knew the teacher better, which suggests that developing a good relationship with the teacher was high on her list of priorities.

The vignette above reveals Beth to be quite an anxious child in the context of school, although not outside of it. These two examples from Beth's conversations with me and the photographs that she took reveal a preoccupation with rules:

SH: so what do you want to tell me about that? About sitting quietly

Beth: Because if you never talk in the class room it might be something really interesting and you don't get to see it, so and it's really important and if you won't listen you won't know what to do. And I always listen and I always know what to do.

SH: You always listen and you always know what to do. What about if you don't know what to do?

Beth: Well, you get told off!

SH: (looking at a photograph Beth had taken) So that's you walking in the ...

Beth: Not running!

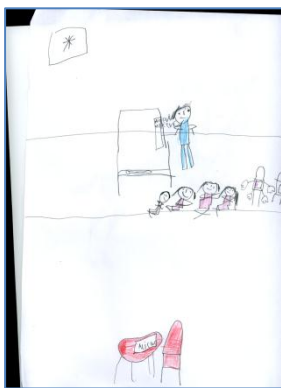
SH: Ok.

Beth: I know why you shouldn't run in school because you could bump into people and that bit is really thin so you could bump your head.

SH: You are probably right.

(from conversation with Beth June 2008)

Not only was she keen to show that she could conform to the school rules, but also



**Picture 6.1 'It's important to write your name on your work (Beth)**

that she could identify the reasons why they were in place.

This drawing of Beth's (left) was done just after the teacher had complained about the children not putting their names on their work. Beth drew the children sitting with their arms folded and legs crossed in front of the white board,

showing how the children were supposed to sit. In the foreground she drew a table and chair with a piece of

paper on the table upon which she has written her name. She also took a photograph of her work with her name on the top and asked me to take a photograph of her 'walking sensibly in the corridor'. It is possible that Beth's focus on conformity and understanding rules was her way of coping with the anxieties that school held for her (Woods 1990, Pollard and Filer 1999). For Beth these efforts were

all a part of maintaining her identity as a good, sensible grown up girl, in which she took a great deal of pride.

Kieran was equally keen to be seen as a good pupil – to the extent that in her interview with me (February 2008) his mother expressed some concern that he was almost being too good. Unlike Beth, however, this was not something that he dwelt on in his conversations with me, but was more in evidence in his interactions with the teachers. Observations of Kieran, both during carpet time and when he was doing work away from the teacher, show him doing his best to conform to the teachers' rules. What is interesting about these observations was the way in which Kieran managed his behaviour in order to conform to the teachers' expectations. This is particularly evident in an observation I made where Kieran had already been sitting for some considerable time. He was finding it difficult to keep still, and used minimal movements, swaying, rocking from side to side in order to keep sitting and paying attention to the teacher.

As far as his relationship with the teacher was concerned, Kieran could be said to be taking a low risk strategy (Pollard and Filer, 1999). However, with regard to his relationships with his peers the strategy he adopted might be considered high risk. Observations of Kieran made when they were in the second term of Year 1, for example, and engaged in table activities show that his desire to be seen as a good pupil superseded his desire to be associated with his peers—telling the teacher that other children were misbehaving even though he was quite amused by their antics. On the one hand, he was reinforcing his good pupil persona, through showing the teacher that it was other children who were misbehaving, and at the same time he

was distancing himself from his friends, which is possibly why his mother was concerned that he was too preoccupied about being good in school.

For Kieran therefore, being a good pupil was more important than developing his relationships with his friends. Jackson and Warin (2000) claim that gender has particular salience at transition points, and friendships have also been noted as having a great deal of importance during transition (Ledger et al, 2000). This may well be the case when children are moving between spaces where they do not know each other very well. When these children moved from the Reception to Year 1, however, they moved as a class and so knew each other quite well. It may be that the aspects of identity identified by Jackson and Warin, and Ledger and her colleagues have less salience to this particular transition. It could also be that children's priorities are also of importance during transition and subsume other aspects of identity.

There are links here with the work of Pollard and Filer (1999) who claim that an over concern with conformity, although a low risk strategy, can sometimes be counter-productive. Kieran and Beth's attitudes towards their school work and learning were affected to some extent by their desire to be good pupils when they moved into Year 1. I have argued that one of the consequences of the move to Year 1 was that children should be able to cope with working by themselves. One of the main threats to Beth's identity as a good pupil was her anxiety about coping with independent work. As I shall explore in section 3 this may well have influenced the way in which she thought about herself as a learner. Although Kieran did not show the same kind of desire to get things right that Beth did, according to his mother he found it very

difficult to ask for clarification if he did not understand something. He was supposed to understand it, and if he did not, it was his problem.

### *6.212 Being a good pupil – getting rewards (Belinda and Lena)*

Although Kieran and Beth were particularly concerned with their identity as a good pupil, there is evidence to support the idea that some children's motivations for conforming were more about deliberately adopting a 'good pupil' persona for the rewards that they could get from it. In this section I will explore this notion through the perspectives of Belinda and Lena.

**Belinda-** a child who enjoyed praise

Belinda was the oldest girl in the class. She had a younger brother who was at home with her mother at the beginning of the study, but who was set to join the nursery the following year, something that Belinda was looking forward to. Her father was Australian and mother Korean. Belinda had been in the school part time in the Nursery for 3 terms and had begun in the Reception in September.

The impression that Belinda gave was that she was very confident and neither she nor her father reported any difficulties with the move to Year 1. In fact, her father felt that her social confidence had increased in Year 1 due to her attendance at drama club. He told me that Belinda had been identified in the Reception as a very able child, although he did say that she seemed to stand out less in Year 1. Belinda's father also explained that his wife, who was Korean, came from a culture where conformity, especially for girls, was a priority.

Observations of Belinda show her sitting up at the front of the carpet, right in front of the teacher, and showing overt signs of good behaviour. It would be easy to see her as the epitome of eager, willing student, but, as I argued in chapter 4 her conversations with me revealed that she was often bored at school. These conversations also revealed a preoccupation with rewards as the excerpt below demonstrates:

SH: how did you feel? Can you remember how you felt when you first started [in Year 1]?

Belinda: Happy

SH: You felt happy. Can you draw me a picture of you going into Year 1? Why did you feel happy?

Belinda: Because it looked like a new class (Aha),,,

SH: so what was nice about it being new that made you happy?

Belinda: mmm er because I wanted to get lots of house points.

SH: You wanted to get lots of house points?

Belinda: yes

SH: So do you get lots of house points?

Belinda: Yeh, but not now, because Ms Hunt rubbed them all out because Adam got loads but now we tidied up really well. And once green house and yellow house can lose because blue house hasn't went to the house party and I'm in blue house.

(from conversation with Belinda, Dec '07)

Although Belinda's father identified conformity as an important cultural construct for his wife (see vignette above), and that this may well have coloured Belinda's attitudes towards her behaviour in school, it would appear that Belinda herself articulated her motivation for conformist behaviour as a means to an end rather than what Pollard and Filer (1999) describe as a low risk strategy. She wanted something and conforming to expected norms was the best way of achieving it. However, there is also some evidence that Belinda was very aware of the power that the teachers exercised over her. In one conversation with me she talked about how different her behaviour was at school from home, saying "there are no teachers at home" (March 2008) Furthermore, during the last term of the Reception and the first term of Year 1 children were chosen to take the register back to the office on a rota basis. In the second term, Ms Ives chose children who were sitting nicely on the carpet. Belinda showed just how quickly she assimilated this change in practice, and not only an understanding of how dependent she was on the teacher's goodwill for the rewards that she wanted, but also that this strategy was not always effective, telling me "Miss Ives never chooses me to put the register back. ... Because I always sit beautifully and she doesn't choose me" (February 2008).

The evidence from conversations with Lena imply that she was also very keen on being rewarded for her good behaviour, particularly in the second term of Year 1, when she was desperate to become star of the week. Interestingly, although Ms Ives, when choosing children to be star of the week talked about their attitude to their work, Lena's efforts were concentrated on showing that she was good, saying that she would get to be star of the week "By being nice and kind, and good, and never disturbing the teacher" (February 2008). This could be evidence of the way in which the behaviourist approaches of the teachers with regard to pupil identity worked to maintain order, although from Lena's conversation it would appear that her motivation for being good and becoming star of the week was a strategy to avoid having to spend time sitting on the carpet. What is clear from both Belinda's and Lena's talk is that they were prepared to put up with discomfort and boredom in the hope of attaining a particular goal. It was not the reward itself that was the goal, but that they were a means to an end – getting to the house party and eating junk food, or avoiding sitting on the carpet. That conforming took some effort is demonstrated by the way in which Belinda talked about places outside the classroom (toilets and playground) as places where she could relax.

#### *6.214 Being a good pupil - not getting into trouble (Tom, Ollie)*

So far I have looked at motivations for being good that have been associated with identity and earning praise and rewards. Other children such as Tom and Ollie were more concerned with not getting into trouble. Like Beth, Tom's photographs also revealed a pre-occupation with the rules. When asked why he always put his finger to his lips he replied "because, 'cos it makes me not talk". However, his concern was



not to show how well he understood the rules, but that he would get into trouble; “You get told off if you are talking” (March 2008). Tom was, according to his mother, a very lively child with a lot of energy, and he described himself as being silly and liking silly games. His behaviour when he thought the teachers were not watching him was quite different, as it was with me, with whom he had an ambivalent relationship.

One particular episode, taken from my field notes reinforces the idea that the children were consciously adopting the role of good pupils for their teachers either as a low risk strategy (keeping out of trouble), or as a means of gaining rewards.

When I went in this afternoon there was a supply teacher in the class. I was going to withdraw, because she had not given consent for me to be there as a researcher. However, she practically dragged me into the classroom saying –“you know the children – great, you can help me”.

I am glad that I stayed because there were some really interesting goings on this afternoon. Firstly, when the children were sitting on the carpet and the teacher was using the white board to demonstrate a number pattern both Ollie and Danny were waiting until her back was turned and jumping up and dancing. As she turned back they would crouch down again and put their fingers to their lips as if they were showing how good they could be. Then, when she turned back again, they jumped up and started dancing again. The other children were watching them and smiling.

By this time they seem to have got used to the idea that I am not going to comment on what they are doing or enforce discipline, so it could be about how far they could go before I intervened, or it could be about how much they could get away with the supply teacher. Either way, they were both deliberately testing the boundaries and amusing their peers at the same time.

(Field notes November 2007)

This episode highlights not only the boys’ adoption of a ‘good pupil’ identity as a strategy for staying out of trouble, but also the situational nature of this strategy (Kowalski 2007, Lawler 2008). Faced with a teacher who was clearly uncomfortable with younger children, Ollie and Danny set about behaving in a way that I had never seen them do before – or after. It seemed to me that they took advantage of the teacher’s discomfort to deliberately challenge her authority. This episode provides

further evidence of the situational nature of the children's identity priorities (Kowalski 2007). It would seem that Ollie's and Danny's concerns about being good, and adopting a 'good pupil' persona was situated with their own class teacher rather than with teachers per se. In this instance the boys could be said to be exhibiting what Pollard (1999) calls an anti-conformist strategy aimed at strengthening their identity as 'silly' or 'cheeky chappies' with their peers. The reaction of the other children might be considered approving and therefore Ollie and Danny were gaining status with their classmates through acting in this way.

Further evidence that the children maintained a deliberately conformist role as a strategy to either avoid trouble or to gain rewards manifested over the course of the study, and particularly towards the final months of my time with them. Observations of the children during time when they were engaged in table activities, particularly those for which there was no end product, showed that they were not only engaged in their own projects, but that they were also adept at keeping an eye on where the teacher was and switching focus rapidly between what they wanted to do and what they had been told to do.

The evidence points to the children engaging in a great deal of self-monitoring behaviour and the deliberate adoption of a 'good pupil' identity, either from a desire to be good, to be rewarded or not get into trouble. The children actively set out to behave well because of the positive (or potentially negative) consequences of their actions. This is also consistent with how Giddens (1984) describes the role of structure within society; the teachers acted in the way that they believed teachers should act, and the children accepted their power over them. As far as the children

were concerned (reinforced by the reward/punishment structure and by parental expectations), the teachers had a right to tell them what to do and they had to be prepared to accept the consequences if they did not do it.

Merry argues that when the children in her study moved between rooms in the preschool, the differences that they anticipated constructed 'expectations and identities for the children' (2007: p55). It is not just differences that create these expectations and identities however; in this study the continuity of discourse in terms of behaviour also created expectations and identities that came into conflict with discontinuities in other areas. When the children, already identified as being good and grown up for being able to sit really nicely, moved from the Reception to Year 1 they were faced with the prospect of having to maintain that identity whilst sitting on the carpet for extended periods despite their antipathy towards it and the discomfort that they felt (see Chapter 4 part 3).

Rules have an important function in transition- they provide a framework within which the individual can act- either conforming or contrary. Both Einarsdottir (2007) and Dockett and Perry (2004) emphasise the importance for children of knowing the rules of behaviour when encountering new situations. It would seem from the evidence of this study that knowing and understanding rules was important not just at the beginning of school, but throughout the time that I spent with the children. Having that knowledge and understanding meant that they were able to both act within the rules and subvert them when they felt they had power to do so without risk. However, it must also be said that the children had to adapt to the expectations of three different teachers during this time, all with slightly different techniques,

which may have influenced the findings. Findings from other studies suggest that children rarely question the rules (Dockett and Perry 2002, Einarsdottir 2007). From the evidence gathered in this study I would argue that the children did not feel that they were in a position to question the rules. They were the children, and the teachers were in charge; something that was constantly reinforced through school rules, behaviour management strategies (rewards and consequences), and by parents who emphasised the need for children to do as the teachers told them in school. When the children felt that they had more power (as they did with me, having put myself in a relatively powerless position, or with supply teachers who seemed to lack confidence), they were much more likely to engage in behaviour that might be considered challenging.

## 6.22 Being a learner

It is not possible to make comparisons between the children's conceptions of themselves as learners between the Reception and Year 1 because although the children did talk about learning in the Reception, they talked about what they had learned rather than being learners. However, there is evidence that either the children's perspectives on learning were influenced by the change when they went into Year 1 or that the children's perspectives about themselves as learners influenced the way in which they experienced the change. For the purposes of this analysis I have chosen to focus on writing for several reasons; firstly because, as I discussed in chapter 4, the discontinuity in the way writing was taught/supported was one of the major features of the move from the Reception to Year 1. Secondly, and probably concomitantly, it was the area of the curriculum that the children

themselves focused on most at the beginning of the year and thirdly it was an area of learning that was emphasised as being problematic for children in other studies (Ofsted 2004, Sanders et al. 2005). This discussion will focus on the links between their perspectives on writing and their perspectives on themselves as learners and the learning dispositions they displayed when engaged on writing tasks.

The increased emphasis on performance rather than practice in the first term of Year 1, noted in chapter 4, seems to have had some impact on the children's feelings about writing and brought to the fore anxieties about specific aspects of writing.

Beth, Poppy, and Tom, expressed concern that they could not do it properly; Tom complained that he did not know the letter sounds, or how to write the letters properly. In the picture that Tom drew for me (right), the use of a red zig-zag for his mouth may well be an indication of his frustration with writing. It was certainly something that he, Beth and Poppy and



Picture 6.2: 'I don't know how to write the words' (Tom)

other children were preoccupied by. At the beginning of Year 1 Lena did not show any signs of anxiety, but towards the end of the year, she began to develop similar feelings about writing to Tom. There is some evidence, mostly from parents, that Will, David and Kieran may also have found writing difficult at the beginning of Year 1. However, in their conversations with me and in class, these three children seemed to be quite confident in their approach to writing once they had become accustomed to the new way of working; both David (eventually) and Kieran cited writing as one

of their favourite things to do in class. Belinda, Danny, Ollie and George, did not express any difficulties with writing

There are several possible reasons why some children should have found it more difficult to manage the change in focus. It was predominantly the younger children who expressed concern about writing, lending credence to the notion that some children are not developmentally ready to manage the school curriculum (Wood and Bennett 1999, Carlton and Winsler 1999). There is evidence from other studies into transition (Demetriou et al. 2000, Dunlop 2002, Margetts 2002, Ofsted 2004, Perry and Dockett 2004, Petriwskyj et al. 2005) that younger children are more likely to have difficulty with transition to school, supporting the idea that a certain level of maturity is necessary before children are able to cope with the demands of the school curriculum. However, not all of the younger children expressed feelings of anxiety, and for most, any anxiety they did feel was short lived. Moreover, the challenge in recent years to understandings of maturational development necessitate a look at alternative explanations for why some children feel anxious, and maintain feelings of anxiety, about their school work. Moreover, the anxieties that the children expressed were specific to writing rather than being global. When the children were involved in other work (for example, making up plays based around fairy tales), they were much more confident and at ease than they were with work that was heavily prescribed by the teachers. A maturational explanation therefore seems unlikely.

Another possible cause for the children's difficulties with transition that has been put forward is a lack of skills needed to be able to manage the work (Lewit and

Schuurman-Baker 1995, Bartholomew and Gustaffson 1997, Shore 1998, Rimm-Kaufmann et al. 2000, Dockett and Perry 2002, Ellis 2002a, Petriwskyj et al. 2005, Stephenson and Parsons 2007). The evidence in this study also may seem to support this idea, at least in part. There was a big discrepancy between the apparent level of skill exhibited by children such as Danny, Belinda, George and Ollie, all of whom were older and more experienced and displayed a higher level of competence with writing, and the younger children. However, watching the younger children, there did not seem to be much difference in terms of skill level between those children who managed writing in Year 1 with confidence and those children who seemed to have some difficulty.

However, although it is impossible to rule this out entirely, level of skill did not seem to be an overriding factor. Tom, David and Will, for example, worked in the same group for writing, yet it was only Tom who persisted in believing that he had difficulty. Moreover, when Ollie, who was one of the oldest and most confident children in the class, had difficulty with a mathematical concept, he reacted in much the same way that Tom did about his writing, showing discomfort and anxiety. What seemed to make most difference was the attitude that the children had towards their level of skill.

What seems to be a more cogent explanation for some children's difficulties over others is the way in which the children thought about themselves as learners. In the vignette (below) Tom's mother has ascribed his difficulties with writing partially to a relative lack of experience, which meant that "so many of them were so much further forward" but also to his being "a bit of a perfectionist" (April 2008).

**Tom- a lively child**

Tom, along with Kieran, was among the youngest of the children in the class. He had been at the school Nursery and had moved into the Reception in January. He was the eldest of three, with a younger sister, who was 2 years younger than him, and a brother who was 3 ½ years younger. His mother cared for the children full-time and his father worked full time in a professional capacity. His parents were both from British backgrounds

Tom's favourite part of the Reception was 'lunch time, because we get to eat', but he also agreed with Kieran that he liked writing and colouring. In fact he 'liked everything about school' except 'when Ms Arthur tells me off'. His photographs show a preoccupation with other children, both boys and girls, who he described as his 'friends'. It seemed at the end of the Reception year that Tom was looking forward to Year 1, telling me that Ms Hunt (who he had just found out was going to be his new teacher) was his favourite teacher. In the first term of Year 1, although he still took a leading role in dramatic play situations he seemed to be much less confident when being asked to do things by the teacher- especially writing tasks. He told me that he did not like writing 'because I don't know the letters.

Tom's mother told me that he was very confident verbally but that he found writing difficult 'especially because he's one of the youngest, and so many of them were so much further forward, and I think he's a bit of a perfectionist... and if things don't come easily to him then he wants to give up'. As the year progressed, although his mother thought that he was gaining confidence, Tom still enjoyed many aspects of school life, especially playing with his friends in the playground, but his attitude towards the work he was asked to do by the teacher remained quite negative particularly writing, telling me; 'I can't do it properly'.

Two ways of thinking about learning emerged from my conversations with the children, and these can be thought of as outward and inward perspectives. Ollie, for example displayed a tendency to think outwardly, comparing himself to other children in the class and telling me "I'm the smartest in the class, I can kick everyone's butt" (March 2008). Tom and Beth, on the other hand seemed to be more concerned about getting things right; Tom told me "I can't do the writing, it's too hard" (June 2008), and Beth "I felt a bit shy and when we done hard work I felt like I didn't do the writing right and I didn't leave some spaces" (November 2007). The children who looked outward were more likely to compare themselves to other children, or to measure their own performance against the teacher's expectations.

Other children tended to make comparisons with their younger or older selves as these three quotes from children's conversations with me demonstrate. "I like doing



hard work because, um, I just try my best to do the work” (Will, November 2007) “I like to learn and be proud of myself. It’s better learning by myself, you feel so clever.” (George, November 2007). “[Y]ou concentrate and you get better and better every day”. (Danny, November 2007). These children could be thought of as having an inward perspective on learning and were more likely to think in terms of their own improvement rather than measuring their performance against other people’s expectations.

**Will – a quiet worker**

Will was one of the youngest children in the class. He had been in the school Nursery and moved into the Reception in January. He had an older brother who was three years above him in the school, and a baby sister who was born in the June of his Reception Year. His father worked full time, and his mother worked part time (3 days a week) and he was cared for by a child-minder when his mother was at work. His parents were both from British backgrounds.

In the Reception he was targeted for one to one sessions with a teaching support assistant because he rarely, if ever, spoke up in class. Observations of him in the Reception and in Year 1 support the idea that he did not talk much with the adults in school, but that he talked comfortably with his friends. He seemed to gain a lot of confidence from having an older brother in the school. In Year 1 he told me that he knew what it was going to be like because his brother had told him. Will appeared to comply unquestioningly with the way things were in school. His big brother had told him about what it was going to be like, and he was more than happy to accept that. Year 1 appeared to be completely in line with his expectations, and therefore he had little to be unhappy about. He liked playing and working, but recognised the priority of work over play in Year 1. He did not mind leaving work that he had not completed to finish off another time, and he was ok with sitting on the carpet, even though it was a bit boring. School was primarily about learning, and while some things might be a bit boring, that was ok, because he was still learning. He was very keen to advance through different levels. His mother was very supportive of his enjoyment of learning, telling me that he was much more advanced than his brother was at the same age, something that was a big incentive for him to work hard.

This vignette of Will’s experiences also demonstrates the role that parents and siblings have to play in shaping children’s learner identities. The encouragement that Will got from his parents meant that, although he was one of the younger children and lacked social confidence, it did not seem to affect his approach to learning.

There are some parallels between the children's understandings of learning and those of the teachers. Those children who had a more outward perspective were those who were more likely to experience anxiety about their performance. In some respects this kind of attitude is akin to Ms Hunt's concerns that the children should be able to do certain things (despite her avowed dislike of rushing children). Just as Ms Hunt was concerned with outside forces judging the children's performance (and therefore her own), so these children seemed to be more concerned about their work in relation to other people's thinking. In contrast, the children who were concerned about their own development seemed to have a view about learning similar to Ms Arthur's view of the transition process as part of a continuum of growing up and getting bigger and therefore learning more and becoming more independent. The discontinuity between the working practices of the Reception and Year 1 were, if anything, something to adjust to as a part of that continuum, but did not, after an initial period of adjustment cause them any difficulties.

These findings fit very well with the theories of Dweck and Cigman. Dweck's (1999) work, which focuses particularly on learner identities, theorises two perspectives on intelligence – fixed and incremental- which can be linked very clearly to the children's inward/outward looking perspectives that I described on the previous page. Dweck argues that:

Some people believe that their intelligence is a fixed trait. They have a certain amount of it and that's that. We call this an "entity theory" of intelligence because intelligence is portrayed as an entity that dwells within us and that we can't change (p2)

Ollie's insistence on being right all the time could be explained in these terms. Dweck argues that 'easy, low-effort success and outperforming other students' make

students with an entity theory feel smart (p3), and that challenges, set-backs or other children doing better than them are a threat to the way they understand their intelligence. Ollie had a self-confessed belief in his 'cleverness' over and above everybody else in the class, and therefore other children being able to do something that he was struggling with, was a threat to that belief. Similarly Tom's concerns about his inability to write words correctly were a barrier to his feeling confident about 'having a go'.

Conversely, those who think of intelligence as an incremental trait tend to explain ability in more malleable, contextual and dynamic terms:

'It's not that people holding [an incremental] theory deny that there are differences about people in how much they know or in how quickly they master certain things at present. It's just that they focus on the idea that everyone, with effort and guidance, can increase their intellectual abilities.  
(Dweck 1999: 3)

Dweck argues that people who think in this way believe that it is possible to become more intelligent through hard work and the application of different strategies. The way that George, Danny and Will talked about their learning seems to indicate that they held the view that it was through working hard, practicing and concentrating that one "got more and more clever every day".

Cigman's (2001) theories pertain to understandings of self-worth (how you judge yourself). Cigman argues that children who look outside for validation may suffer from feelings of low self-worth if not so validated. Thus when Ollie and Tom encountered difficulties with challenges other children managed more easily, such as doubles, or spellings, this constituted a direct threat to their self-esteem (something that Dweck also maintains). Danny, Kieran, George and Will, on the other hand

showed characteristics more akin to Dweck's conception of incremental intelligence, whereby they got cleverer by learning more and doing their best. Similarly they exhibited characteristics of children with what Cigman calls 'boundless self-worth' (p567); prepared to have a go and take failure as a part of the learning process.

It would appear that those children who seemed to have more inward looking, incremental perspectives about their learner identities were more resilient to the changes in pedagogical style that they experienced with the different teachers. It is also possible that Kieran and Will had a more resilient attitude towards the change in teaching focus because of the support that they got from home. Will's mother was very confident about his abilities, especially in comparison to his older brother, who had been 'less academically inclined' at that age. Will, therefore was getting a great deal of encouragement and confidence from home. Kieran's mother had trained as a primary school teacher and she spent a couple of sessions a week helping out in the class, something that he appeared to value quite highly and so it is possible that he got a great deal of support from her presence. David, who as I mentioned in chapter 4, had a very shaky start to the beginning of Year 1, was the subject of enhanced communication between home and school and received some targeted support around the mechanics of writing coupled with explicit support from home and school, which seemed to help him to come to terms with the change.

It is also possible that Beth, Tom and Poppy were more sensitive to the teacher's expectations. The insights that their parents gave again shed some light on what might be some factors that affected their thinking. Tom's perfectionism, for example may have meant that he found not being able to do something the way that he

thought it should be done quite frustrating. Thus, when the focus on writing became more about punctuation and spelling with a greater emphasis on achievement rather than having a go, and the support of the teacher was withdrawn, he lost any confidence he might have had in his ability to write properly. Poppy's mother told me that Poppy had difficulty with being one of the younger children in the class. As I explained in chapter 5, Poppy's prevailing interests were about the world of the grown up and so it may be that Poppy was associating getting something right with being grown up. Although Beth's mother told me that she was more concerned that Beth should be happy in school than with her academic performance, she also spoke of Beth's anxieties concerning school.

There were different ways in which children managed these anxieties. Beth and Poppy managed these feelings of discomfort by seeking help. However the two girls had different attitudes towards help seeking. For Poppy it was a means to an end – getting help now meant that she would be able to do it by herself later. Beth on the other hand thought that she was not very clever at writing and sums and that she needed help all the time in order to do her work properly. The excerpt from a conversation that I had with Beth and Poppy (below) reveals that Beth did not really think of herself as an independent learner.

Beth: Zebras is the bottom group. Because we work with the teacher.

SH: but then, it can't be that bottom group, because you are really good at writing aren't you?

Beth: yeah

Poppy: But they have to be the bottom group.

SH: But what does that mean though?

Beth: It means that all the other children work all by their selves but we don't so we get to learn more and we get to do something else easier.

Poppy: yeah and I'm ok because actually...

Beth: and that means that it's at the bottom of the classroom. That's the bottom group.

SH: so how do you feel about that?

Beth: um, I feel... Well it's ok for me, because none of the other children care. They just want to get on with their work and never look at me so I don't care. I don't care if I'm in the bottom group.

(from conversation with Poppy and Beth, March 2008)

It could be argued that Beth's concern for being a 'good girl' impacted on her identity as a learner. Part of being good meant that you could get on and do your work and her lack of confidence in being able to do the work was a threat to her identity as a good girl. Being in the bottom group however was less of a threat because she both had the support of Ms Webb or Ms Ives when she was working, and the expectations of performance were lower in the bottom group. An outward looking perspective is also hinted at towards the end, when she says "it's ok for me because none of the other children care". It implies that if she did believe other children were interested in her being in the bottom group then that might be problematic.

There are a couple of examples that illustrate the different ways in which the two girls thought about help. On one occasion when I came into the room Poppy approached me purposefully and told me to "come and help me with my writing". She knew what she wanted to write but she wanted help to be able to spell the words correctly. As the year progressed she asked for help less and less, until she got to the point where she told me she could "get on with my work like a grown up girl". Beth, on the other hand did not reach that point during the year. On another occasion, when there was a supply teacher in the classroom she dissolved into tears when asked to do some writing telling me that she "couldn't do it."

For Poppy, therefore, help-seeking was a tool, something that she used when she felt she needed it. Beth on the other hand used help as a prop; something that she needed in order to succeed at her work. Fortunately for Beth, her sense of self-worth was not allied to her understandings of herself as a learner but to her ability to be good, sensible and useful to the teacher (see discussion in section 6.21).

Unlike the girls Tom rarely (if ever) asked for help. For example on one occasion at the beginning of Year 1, the children had been asked to draw three pictures and write three sentences about what they had done over the half term. Although Tom had had a busy holiday having gone to Kew Gardens with his mother, brother and sister and to the Natural History Museum to see the dinosaurs, he made no attempt to write – investigating a hole in the wall and playing with his pencil- until the helper went and sat next to him and effectively forced him to write a couple of sentences. Like Beth, his lack of confidence with writing endured throughout the year. Even though he got better at writing and knowing the letters, he still did not think that he had improved much, persisting in thinking that he was “rubbish” and could not do it properly.

In terms of adapting to new ways of working Poppy’s experience and use of help was a positive one, and accords with Marchand & Skinner’s (2007) view that help seeking can be a positive response if the learner feels that they do not have the personal resources to manage a task at that particular time, and is positively correlated with increased levels of engagement with school work over time. It can also be equated with Dweck’s explanation of a mastery response. According to Dweck, mastery responses to difficulty allow people to make use of strategies aimed at increasing

their level of learning and include persistence in the face of failure. Getting things right was important to Poppy as part of her identity as a 'grown up girl', but she was able to view the help of others as a means of helping her to that goal. Beth's and Tom's responses to the difficulties that they had with writing, however, could be considered helpless (Dweck 1999). Helpless reactions to difficulty, according to Dweck place the responsibility for failure outside of the control of the learner. Although Beth was positive about writing, she persisted in thinking that she could not do it without help, and retained feelings of anxiety throughout the year. Similarly, Tom's response to his difficulties with writing were that he couldn't do it because he was 'rubbish', and not because he lacked experience. Tom persisted in being less than positive, leading him to avoid writing where he could and fret about it where he could not. It could be argued that they were developing negative dispositions towards writing; Beth by becoming dependent on adult help and Tom by concealing his feelings of anxiety from the teacher and refusing to ask for help, even though he felt as though he was having difficulty.

There are several possible reasons for Tom's reluctance to seek help with writing. When he was talking to me about his writing, his voice became much higher and he seemed to shrink in on himself, which could suggest that he associated the need for help, or not being able to do something with being little. It is also possible that his understanding of gender precluded his help seeking – several studies have noted that boys are much less likely to seek help than girls (Howe 1997). Alternatively it could be attributed to his perfectionism which suggests that it may be a personal



trait rather than one that was influenced by social structures or it could be a combination of these reasons that maintained Tom's anxious approach to writing.

It could be argued, therefore that in terms of thinking about themselves as writers, Tom and Beth's management of the transition was not particularly successful. It is entirely possible that, as younger children, they lacked the maturity or the skills to be able to manage their role as writers effectively.

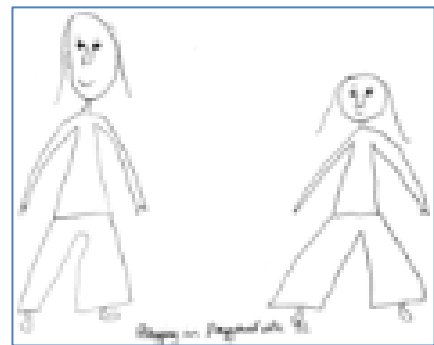
There was, therefore a fundamental difference in the way that some of the children thought about their writing than did others, and it is this: Will, Kieran, George, Belinda, Lena and David were prepared to have a go, do what they could and were prepared to get things wrong because they felt that that they were getting better all the time. Once they had settled in to Year 1, their feelings about themselves as learners were not compromised by feelings of doubt about whether they could or could not write the words properly. They had a resilient attitude towards their learning. Tom, Beth, and Ollie, by contrast were more likely to compare their performance to that of other children, and they were much more vulnerable to feelings that they could not do it, which had implications for the way they thought about themselves.

I chose to focus on writing in particular because it highlights the anxieties that some children faced when they went into Year 1. Whilst other children seemed to be more resilient, it is significant that writing was an area that changed the most when the children moved from the Reception to Year 1. I have argued in Chapter 4 that the biggest difference between Reception and Year 1 in terms of learning was an increase in performance orientation rather than participation or practice. I also

argued that the children were much more positive about work that they considered to be practice, participation or gave them some kind of control over the outcome. Dweck (1999) is very clear that it is possible to change a person's learner orientation either to increase or decrease a tendency towards a fixed idea about intelligence. Howard (2010) has also attested to the influence of adult orientations to children's understandings about learning and learners. The evidence from this study would appear to suggest a focus on participation and practice in Year 1 is of more benefit to all the children rather than a focus on performance.

### 6.23 Growing up and getting bigger

Moving up from the Reception to Year 1 seems to be particularly associated with understandings of growing up and getting bigger (White and Sharp 2007), and the data that the children produced supported this association, and also seemed to colour their perspectives of their time in Reception. This may be to do with the way in which the children were separated from the



Picture 6.3: I like playing with Year 2 Children (Belinda)

rest of the school in the Reception (See Chapter 4). Both Ollie and Belinda talked about being able to play with older children. Belinda's drawing of what she liked best in Year 1 (see picture 6.3 above right) shows her in the playground with a bigger girl. Ollie was particularly scathing about the Reception playground, telling me "It was too rubbish. Because it was TOO SMALL for me to fit in!" Similarly Kieran's perceptions of being in the Reception seemed to connect to understandings of being grown up.

**Kieran-** not liking being little

Kieran was one of the youngest boys in the class. He had been at the school Nursery and moved into the Reception in January. He was the elder of two children; his sister being three years younger than him. His father worked in a professional capacity, and his mother, who was qualified as a primary school teacher, looked after his sister full-time. His parents both came from British backgrounds.

Kieran was one of the youngest children taking part in the study, and he did not like the distinction between the younger and older children in the Reception, which coloured his experience. He was the oldest in his family, and very proud of his position as big brother, which conflicted with his position as one of the youngest children in the class. He was very keen to be seen as a 'good pupil' to the extent that it impacted on his relationship with his 'best friend' Tom.

Although he seemed to be happy when he was in the Reception, Kieran was looking forward to going into Year 1 and doing harder work. In Year 1 Kieran persisted in telling me he had not liked the Reception. It took me some time to find out why he did not like it, because he had seemed to like the teachers and enjoy a good relationship with other children in the class. Eventually, however, he told me that "I did not like being little and I did not like being four" (conversation March '08).

Kieran was extremely keen to be seen as conforming to expectations- possibly because of his desire to be seen as one of the big children. Of all the children involved in the study he was happiest with explicit teaching/instructions and seemed a little hesitant when engaged in open ended activities.

Kieran's view of himself in the Reception as being little was possibly exacerbated by the way in which those children who started school in January were effectively separated from the older children for some of the learning tasks (especially phonics sessions) because of their relative lack of experience. It seemed that in the Reception, Kieran could not get away from being one of the 'little ones'. In Year 1, however, when all the children moved up together as a cohort, he became one of the grown up children who were ready to move up to the big school rather than one of the little ones.

The data show differing approaches to understandings about growing up that may affect the way in which the children understood the changing working practices in the transition from Reception to Year 1. The way that Ollie positioned himself, for example, is typical of the way in which he talked about himself (to me at any rate);

SH: Here's Ollie [in a photograph]. Tell me about Ollie  
Ollie: Funny, silly, stupid, Mr Smarty-pants  
SH: Mr Smarty-pants  
Ollie: And the smartest in the class and the tallest.  
SH: The smartest and the tallest in the class eh?  
Ollie: Everybody else is in nappies.  
(Interview with Ollie Year 1 Term 2)

It seemed to me that as far as Ollie was concerned there was a definite link between his understandings of being older and being clever, which had consequences for the way in which he dealt with difficult work, and with work where the outcome was ambiguous (see chapter 4). David and Will, however, did not talk about being grown up, but about growing up. That is they seemed to think about growing up in terms of process rather than achievement and about comparing their younger and older selves rather than comparing themselves with other children. George, Danny, Will and David all talked about moving up to Year 1 in terms of getting bigger, and growing up, but although being more able was a part of growing up, they did not talk in absolutes, but in terms of learning more and getting better rather than being able to get things right. It was also apparent that these children seemed less concerned with comparing themselves to other children, and more with thinking about their own development, as this quote from a conversation with David demonstrates;

David: Yes and I'm 6 now.  
SH: You're 6 now ...  
David: It feels really nice because I like being older and older and older and older!  
SH: What's so good about being older and older?  
David: well I want to be fast, so when I get older and older and older I will be faster.  
SH: Oh I see, so you get better at being faster do you?  
David: yes because um when I was 5 I was this fast  
SH: oh,  
David: and now (he gets up and runs really fast to the end of the play area)  
(conversation with David, Jun '08)

The evidence that I gathered with the children would appear to support the notion that growing up forms a major feature of the identity discourse that is prevalent in

the linear progression from one class to another (Merry 2007), and in this case from Reception to Year 1. Similar evidence from children cited in Sanders et al (2005) and White and Sharp (2007) would also appear to substantiate the notion that growing up is an important part of identity over the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. However, it seems that, although the adults put forward particular views about being grown up, the children's interpretations were mediated by other influences as well; for some it formed a part of their understandings about learning, whereas other children made links between ideas about growing up and growing out of toys, or of having to be sensible and do as one was told, or indeed about losing the stigma of being one of the little ones.

## Summary

In this chapter I have examined the interplay of social and personal identity in shaping the children's perceptions of the transition from the Reception to Year 1. I have argued that, in addition to wider social identity discourses concerning gender and culture, there were three more locally produced aspects of social identity that were particularly salient in the transition from the Reception to Year 1; pupil identity, learner identity and growing up and getting bigger. However, it is important to note that, whilst I have separated these out for the purposes of discussion, they are actually closely linked and, together with the wider social discourses and children's own personal characteristics, form a background to the children's responses to the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

I have contended that each child's responses and actions in the context of school were motivated by different priorities concerning these aspects of identity. Whilst

some children might be motivated by their perceptions of what it means to be a good pupil, others might be more concerned with their perceptions of themselves as learners, or as 'grown up'. However I have also explored the view that these priorities are highly dependent on context (Kowalski 2007). The evidence suggests that the children's priorities changed depending on who they were with, where they were, what they were doing, how closely they were being watched and by whom.

I have also argued that the ways in which the children perceived these aspects of identity were also important. The children who talked about identity in fixed terms, such as being grown up, or being clever, or being good, tended to show more evidence of vulnerability when encountering difficulties, and were more likely to display helpless responses in these circumstances. The children who talked about themselves in more contingent terms, however, were more likely to take difficulties in their stride.

The evidence from this study suggests that the children's perceptions of identity both influenced their perceptions of the transition and were influenced by the transition itself; the children revealed clear perceptions of themselves within the context of school and at the same time showed signs that these perceptions were affected by the changes in context when they moved into Year 1; indeed, they showed a great deal of sensitivity to even minor changes in the teachers' approaches and were very quick to accommodate to any changes in style.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications

### Introduction

This concluding chapter aims to bring together the findings from the previous chapters and to further illuminate the questions that guided this research. There were two main questions that were aimed at understanding further the interplay between structure and agency during the transition from the Reception to Year 1: *'How does the school context change between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?'*, and *'In what ways are children's perspectives on school affected by the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum?'* Several issues relating to children's thinking about, feelings about and attitudes towards their school experiences have been brought to the fore that highlight just how sensitive the children were to variations in the contexts of school learning (Howard 2008, Bloomer and Hodgkinson 2000), and it is from this premise that the findings and the implications for practice will be discussed.

With regard to the first question in part 1 of the chapter I will examine the interplay between the different levels of curriculum development and discuss the changes in context between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. In the second part of the chapter I will bring together the findings from Chapters 4, 5 and 6 that explore the questions relating to the effects of the transition between the Reception and Year 1 on the children's perspectives of school and discuss findings relating to: play and work; autonomy and control; and identity. In the third part of the chapter I will discuss the implications of these findings for the development of curriculum and pedagogy, beginning with the local context of the school and then looking at the

implications for wider national curriculum policies. In the final part of the chapter I will consider the contribution that this project can make with regards to transitions theory relating to constructs such as readiness, continuity and change and identity.

### **Part 1: In what ways do the contexts between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 change?**

As I have argued in chapter 3 the tensions between the ideas about learning in pre-school and school have been well documented (Bennett et al 1997, Moss and Petrie 2000 Ellis 2002b, Wood and Attfield 2005). These tensions are not exclusive to the differences between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, but they are exemplified within them and in policy documents relating to children's learning in schools. These tensions come about through the opposition between a view of children as active agents in the learning process who should have the freedom to control their own learning agenda and a view of children as passive recipients of knowledge and skills that have been determined as being important to meet the needs of society. Whilst it can be said that the *CGFS* tends more towards promoting a view of children as active agents, and that Curriculum policy documents at Key Stage 1 tend towards a view of children as passive recipients, these tensions are clearly present in all of the documents and therefore in both the Reception and in Year 1.

In creating a Foundation Stage unit Winterbourne School's response to the introduction of the Foundation Stage is in line with many other schools (Garrick and Chilvers 2003). This means that children in the Reception are more associated with the Nursery than the rest of the school. I have argued in Chapter 3 that this sets up a particular dynamic of children in the Reception as being 'little ones', which has the



potential to associate the move from the Reception to Year 1 with ideas about being grown up (Sanders et al 2005, White and Sharp 2007), something that I will take up later in this chapter when I come to look at the children's perspectives.

The separation between Mix-up time and teaching time in the Reception and at the beginning of Year 1 can be seen as a way of meeting the challenge of the competing tensions that I have discussed in the above section. I have argued that this daily routine amounted to a horizontal transition for the children in that they were expected to adopt very different learner identities in both. During Mix-up time children were expected to be able to manage their own learning goals (where these did not conflict with the teachers' priorities or limitations). During teaching time children were expected to suppress their own desires and conform to teachers' expectations. The gradual decline of the amount of time available for Mix-up time throughout the Reception and into Year 1 is indicative of the premium that is placed upon teacher directed activity and pre-determined learning goals as children go through the schooling system.

The teachers played a big role in both interpreting and mediating both national and school policies. Whilst the evidence pointed to all three teachers' belief in the importance of activity and the use of children's interests as a basis for planning, areas of conflict and or confusion were also apparent, although each of the teachers had their own interpretation of the problems that they faced. For Ms Arthur the conflict came in developing a working relationship with her colleagues and conforming to the school's routines. Ms Hunt's belief that children of Year 1 age should have freedom to explore clashed with her desire to show that the children

were working towards the predetermined outcomes of the Standard Attainment Tasks in Year 2. Ms Ives was experiencing her own transition to a new school, which took up a lot of energy, and she was therefore concerned that she was not doing a good job of making the learning experiences that she planned for the children as enjoyable as they should be.

One of the main areas for concern with regard to the transition between the Reception and Year 1 is children's readiness to manage teacher directed activities (Sanders et al 2005, Ellis 2002a). Far from being abrupt, the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 at Winterbourne school might be said to have begun at the start of the Reception with the introduction of short sessions of phonics and number, or possibly even before that as the children were prepared to make the transition from Nursery to Reception. As the Reception year progressed the amount of time that the children had for self-directed activity gradually lessened as teacher directed time increased and play was phased out of the learning curriculum and became a part of the regulatory system with the introduction of the concept of 'Golden time' in Year 1 as a reward for good behaviour. The transition on one level can therefore be thought of as a gradual one. However, differences in teachers' views about their role as teachers and their views about children as learners did lead to some abrupt changes.

I have argued in chapter 4 that there were some big differences between the Reception and Year 1, not only in the amount of teacher directed activity, but also in the way that the teachers interacted with the children during these times. I have argued that teaching in the Reception can generally be seen as a collaborative

activity with the teacher as leader and supporter and can be allied to Bernstein's (2000) description of learning as process. Whilst teaching approaches were more varied in Year 1, children were increasingly expected to work on teacher directed activities either on their own or with a small group of other children. This amounts to a change in the definition of independence; in the Reception independence was associated with freedom of choice and activity, whereas in Year 1 independence was associated with the ability to do as the teacher has told you to do- more closely allied to Bernstein's view of learning as performance. This is the context in which the children experienced the transition from the Reception to Year 1.

The strong classification and framing (Bernstein 2000) between teacher time and Mix-up time in Reception and in the first term of Year 1 at Winterbourne School is indicative of the dominance of discourses about play and work for teachers, children and parents; the children talked about their school experiences either in terms of play or work, thus reinforcing a dichotomous understanding of these terms (Bennett et al. 1997, Adams et al. 2004, Wood and Attfield 2005). However, a more nuanced understanding of Bernstein's terminology was necessary to fully understand the relationship between the context and children's perceptions of their school life; a dichotomous approach viewing activities as either strongly or weakly framed was not useful.

What was useful, however, was looking at activities in relative terms. For example, Mix-up time could be understood as having a weaker classification and framing than teaching time, but being more strongly classified and framed than Golden time, or play time. Similarly, the analysis of teaching time revealed considerable variations in

the classification and framing of activities depending on the teachers' intentions, providing a context whereby perceptions of learning and learner identity could be conceptualised and valued quite differently in play and in work situations, by different groups and for different reasons. It would be useful to examine this notion further with a more focussed study in to pedagogical practices and the learner identities that they produce.

## **Part 2: In what ways are children's perspectives affected by the transition from Reception to Year 1?**

### **7.21 Children's views about play and work**

There are three main areas that I want to discuss with regard to play and work. Firstly I want to discuss the implications of the strong classification and framing of Mix-up time and teacher time in the Reception and In Year 1. Secondly, I want to explore the effects of the organisational changes between Reception and Year 1 on both parents' and children's thinking about play and work, and thirdly the effects of conceptual changes in teachers' use of play and work on children's thinking.

In this thesis I have explored the relationship between context and children's identities. The children's responses to the changes in emphasis on play and work, and the changing conceptions of play and work between the Reception and Year 1 reveal the potential that these differing contexts have to influence children's identities and particularly with regard to learner identity. The analyses in Chapters 4 and 5 also point to the relationship between changes in pedagogic practices, the children's understandings of play and work and their understandings about learning (Howard 2010). As I argued in chapter 5 these findings accord very well with

Howard's (2008) research, which indicates a relationship between the way that play is used as a part of the curriculum and children's thinking about play and learning. I argued that an increased emphasis on individual achievement and performance in Year 1, contrasted with the focus on participation in learning activities in the Reception, had the potential to materially affect children's perceptions of what it meant to be a learner. At the same time I have also argued that the way in which play moved from an educational to a regulative tool, particularly in the second term of Year 1, had implications for the way in which children perceived the place of play as a medium for learning. While Howard's research looked specifically at children's conceptions of play the results from this study, with its focus on changing curriculum and pedagogy, suggests that these effects are not only confined to children's understandings of play and learning, but also work and learning and their own learner identities.

The strong classification (Bernstein 2000) between the Foundation Stage and the rest of the school has further implications for the children's perceptions about play, work and learning, as it served to differentiate Foundation Stage children from the rest of the school, which had consequences for the way in which children perceived the transition from the Reception and their own roles or identities in school; I argued in Chapter 3 that this distinction served to set up a perception of children in the Foundation Stage as little ones and that it is likely that the coincidence between the change in school organisation and the increased focus on work rather than play also served to accentuate a view, voiced by several parents and children, that Year 1 was the start of 'real school' when 'serious learning' began. Consequentially, the value of

play (as in children's self-directed activity) as a part of the learning context was diminished and work learning increased in importance. However, for some children like Tom and Beth the increased association of teacher directed activity with performance and achievement was linked with feelings of anxiety and had the potential to have a detrimental effect on their learner identities.

The tensions between learner-centred and content-centred ideas about curriculum, with their concomitant constructions of children and learners, have been apparent throughout this research project and has highlighted the potential for even minor variations in curriculum context to influence the children's perceptions of school and of their pupil and learner identities. In the next sections I will look more particularly at the children's perceptions in terms of their feelings about school, understandings of identity in school and conceptions of autonomy and control.

## **7.22 Children's feelings about school.**

In chapter 4 I indicated that the transition from the Reception to Year 1 engendered a variety of feelings in the children, ranging from excitement, enjoyment and anticipation to anxiety and boredom (Sanders et al. 2005). Other studies into transition (Peters 2000, Sanders et al. 2005) have argued that this may be seen as a temporary problem for many children and may be overcome by providing appropriate support for children, such as David, who find coping with change difficult. It would seem that a close collaboration between parent and school in cases such as this, along with some targeted support can be beneficial in helping children to overcome anxieties caused by adapting to new places and people.

What I have chosen to focus on in my study, however, is the evidence concerning feelings the children expressed about their school experiences once the novelty of being in a new class with new ways of working had worn off. The data suggest that some children's anxieties about work and getting it right were not always about getting used to another way of working, or developing a relationship with a new teacher, but may be connected to their perceptions about learning and about their perceptions of themselves as successful or unsuccessful learners. The findings from this study support the view that feelings have a major part to play in understanding children's thinking about and responses to learning situations and the development of learning dispositions (Dweck 1999, Dowling 2000, Cigman 2001, Carr and Claxton 2002). In particular, the work of Dweck in highlighting children's mastery or helpless responses to difficulty and Cigman's theories about the effects of inward and outward perspectives on self-esteem have proved valuable in understanding the children's responses to changes in their learning environment.

What came through strongly from the evidence was the interplay between the children's perceptions about learning and the way in which activities were put to them. As Dweck points out, it is possible to change a person's orientation towards learning, but it is not clear whether this change could be permanent or whether it could be dependent up on the context of the learning environment or upon the child's own definition of their ability. A further area for study emanating from this research would be to look more closely at children's emotional responses to different learning experiences and how their expectations about themselves as learners impacts upon their learner orientation. Nevertheless, at this early stage in a

child's learning career, it would appear to be very important that fears about failing be minimised as much as possible in order to help all children develop positive attitudes towards learning. Collaborative learning, or activities that were put forward as practice, or 'having a go' seemed to be much less threatening than those activities that had an element of performance – particularly with writing. This does not mean that children should not be challenged- far from it, because a lack of challenge is something that many of the more experienced children identified as 'boring' when they went into Year 1. What does seem to be of importance, given the children's responses, is to manage that challenge in such a way that the children develop positive 'mastery' approaches to their learning (Dweck 1999, Dowling 2000). If, as Barrett (1989) claims, it is in the early years of schooling that these learning responses are set, then both the Reception and Year 1 would appear to be very important years to develop these attitudes towards learning.

### **7.23 Children's perspectives on autonomy and control**

Understandings about mastery and self-esteem are not sufficient to explain children's reactions entirely and I have also considered children's views on autonomy and the role of self-direction in engagement and motivation. The analysis of work and play undertaken using Bernstein's modalities of practice reveal that for the children, the way in which activities were framed was of more importance than who set the parameters of the task. There would appear to be an inverse relationship between strongly classified and framed activity and children's interest and engagement. Heavily teacher directed work that was strongly classified and framed meant that the children were essentially passive in terms of agency even though



they might be physically or mentally active. Weaker framing, even where the teacher set the parameters of the task allowed for active agency on the part of the children; they were able to make decisions about how to conduct the activity.

The findings articulated in Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the importance that the children placed on having opportunities to choose what to do for themselves, to be able to follow their own interests and to be with children of their choosing rather than the teachers'. The analysis of children's thinking about work undertaken in chapter 4 also showed that they preferred teacher directed activities that had similar attributes, which would seem to suggest that it is not only play per se that the children value, but a level of control over learning opportunities. This view is supported by the less enthusiastic views expressed about and avoidance of work that was heavily teacher directed and the waning enthusiasm for school that was also associated with feelings of boredom caused by too much control and repetition (Ofsted 2004, White and Sharp 2007).

Whether one subscribes to the theory expounded by Deci and Ryan (2002), that a desire for self-control or autonomy is an innate human characteristic, or that autonomy is a characteristic that has been socially constructed within Early Childhood services as being of primary importance in learning situations (Bruce 1997, QCA 2000), the children clearly expressed a desire for autonomy that is similar to those that have been expressed in other studies that take the views of children into account (Pollard and Triggs 2000, Burke and Grosvenor 2003, Flutter and Rudduck 2004). These findings would appear to give credence to Froebel's view that play or 'freely-active employments', are an important part of young children's

education, but that adult intervention in terms of providing children with appropriate guidance is equally important (Froebel and Jarvis 1885:228-9). Whilst I concur with Bernstein's view that agency, even where classification and framing are weaker, is only apparent because it is the adult who controls the learning environment, it would seem that even the appearance of agency was an important motivating factor for the children.

I have argued that the evidence from this study also supports a link, both in Reception and in Year 1, between children's interests and preoccupations and involvement in school activities (Sylva et al. 2004, Wood 2010). For some children in particular, the closer that school projects and subjects accorded with their own interests the greater their involvement in teacher directed activities. I also found that some of the data concurred with Maddock's (2006) findings that children often have learning goals that have very little to do with the kinds of learning that adults consider important. Indeed it was a major factor in children's expressed preference for play rather than work. As I argued in the previous section, a great deal of importance has been attached to the development of positive attitudes and dispositions for learning in the early years of schooling including the role of motivation in helping children to progress (Barrett 1989, Carr and Claxton 2002). The parameters of this project do not allow me to make generalisations throughout the primary phase, but it would seem that a concern for curriculum content is of less concern in Year 1 than the pedagogy that the children experience in Year 1.

## 7.24 Children's perspectives on identity

Whilst there is evidence that changes in curriculum contexts and the way in which learning is presented to children has an effect on the children's thinking about school, the relationship between these changes and the children's identities is rather more complex. In Chapter 6 I discussed the importance of children's own self-perceptions on the way in which they managed the transition to Year 1. The children could be thought of as falling into two groups: those who talked about being grown up and/or being able or not able, and those who talked about growing up, learning more and getting cleverer. Children from the first group, such as Tom, Beth, Poppy and Ollie, could be thought of as having quite fixed ideas about themselves. Tom, Beth and Ollie also seemed to be concerned with their performance relative to other children and to the expectations of the teacher (Cigman, 2001, Dweck, 1999). Children, such as Will, David, Belinda and Danny, who exhibited more flexible or incremental views about learning and identity tended to be more resilient (Dunlop 2007).

Resilience has been highlighted as a factor in helping children to make successful transitions. The evidence suggests that there is a link between identity and resilience. The children who had more flexible ideas about themselves were less likely to suffer from anxieties about their performance in school- something that was an issue for several of the children. It seems likely, therefore, that the more flexible self-perceptions children like Danny and Will exhibited were useful during transition periods in helping them to adjust to new ways of thinking and working.

### **Part 3: Some Implications for Curriculum Development over the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1**

Although only a small scale study, if these findings are to be acknowledged then they raise several issues that should be given consideration when supporting children during the transition to Key Stage 1 and possibly other transitions as well. Firstly, they highlight the power of context, including the teachers' attitudes, to influence children's thinking about learning in very subtle ways. Secondly they reinforce the notion that the affective side of children's learning- their feelings, attitudes and dispositions- are of equal importance to the cognitive and intellectual side- what and how they learn (Dowling 2000, Carr and Claxton 2002). And thirdly, they support Howard's (2010) contention that understanding the way in which children make sense of their learning experiences is an important part of supporting their learning.

It would seem that play has a great deal of potential to provide a platform for learning in the Year 1 curriculum as well as in the Reception. The findings suggest that the children valued play in the curriculum for a number of reasons, all of which had educational significance in terms of developing positive attitudes towards learning; motivation, following interests, taking control of learning situations, and developing social and emotional resilience. During the course of this study, however, it was clear that the children increasingly experienced play either as a reward, or as a break from the drudgery of learning.

The sensitivity that the children exhibited to nuances in the way that play was used in the classroom, which seemed to change their thinking about play, work and learning, has implications for the staff as a team and highlights the need to build

understanding between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1; to examine attitudes towards children and learning, to build stronger links between learning in the Reception and Year 1 and to explore the possibilities of building play into the Year 1 curriculum in such a way that it demonstrates that teachers value the children's own efforts. On the rare occasions where this did happen, the children's responses attested to its true value.

It would not be right, however, to place too much emphasis on play. The analyses of children's thinking about work (teacher directed activity) I undertook in Chapter 4 suggests that the children also valued work for providing opportunities to learn more and get better at doing things as a part of growing up, which was a significant motivating factor for several of the children. It may well be that an integrated approach to curriculum, advocated by Wood and her colleagues (2010) that makes use of children's preferences and interests when planning for their learning, would be very advantageous in Key Stage 1. However, this is something that is hard to reconcile with a content driven curriculum such as the National Curriculum and the focus on standards and achievement that is so evident in the policy documents that I analysed in Chapter 3. The Welsh Foundation Phase (DfCELLS 2008) encompasses children up until the age of 7. This phase is currently being evaluated ([wales.co.uk](http://wales.co.uk) accessed April 2012) and it may be useful to pay attention to the findings from this evaluation.

The evidence suggests that understanding the way children experience work activities is very important. In Chapter 3 I described three metaphors for learning; acquirement, participation and knowledge creation. I have argued in Chapter 4 that

participation seemed to be the dominant metaphor in the Reception, with children largely taking part in group activities, or in work with an adult. Whilst participation was also evident in Year 1, I have argued that there was an increase in focus on achievement and performance; for example in tasks such as writing sentences with full-stops and capital letters. Whilst a concern for achievement may be at the forefront of Government's ideas about education, the evidence would seem to suggest that too great a focus on achievement- e.g. what children are supposed to know and when -may be counterproductive at Key Stage 1, especially for children like Tom and Ollie, who were very concerned about getting things right.

Given the greater resilience exhibited by children with more flexible attitudes towards learning and learner identities that I described in Part 1, it may well be useful to explore ways in which this flexibility can be promoted for all children. Dweck's work (1999) implies that fixed/incremental understandings of learning are not necessarily immutable, but can be influenced by the interactions and attitudes of others. It also accords well with a view that a sense of self is highly contextual (Kowalski 2007); something that the way in which some of the children tended to act in different learning situations tends to emphasise.

Whilst it would seem from the analyses undertaken of the teacher's thinking and interactions with the children in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 that they had some firm beliefs about children and learning, the tensions that exist in the early years of schooling in this country- between the perceived needs of the child as they are and the need to make progress towards pre-determined goals set by government were very apparent. It was also clear that the teachers preferred to cite other practitioners and

practical examples to illustrate what they believed as effective pedagogy rather than claiming any theoretical basis for their beliefs. It may well be that some further professional development aimed at strengthening teachers' theoretical understandings of learning and pedagogy might be useful in helping them to reconcile those tensions.

#### **Part 4: The national context- looking forward**

I have argued at the beginning of this chapter that the tensions between learner-centred and content-centred ideas about curriculum predate both the *National Curriculum* and the *CGFS* and have been at the heart of debates about education for some time and they are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Since the inception of this research there have been two independent curriculum reviews commissioned by government; one of the *National Curriculum* (Rose 2009) and the other of the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DCSF) that replaced the *CGFS* in 2008 (Tickell 2011). Both of these reviews have made some suggestions about how the links between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 can be improved.

Rose made suggestions regarding the curriculum – that the primary curriculum should include strong cross-curricular themes that are similar to (but different from) the areas of learning and development that are a part of the Foundation Stage, something that he claims will enable teachers to see the links between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 more effectively. In order to ameliorate some of the difficulties that the younger children in the class experience when coming into school at a later date the *Rose Review* recommended that all eligible children should enter Reception Classes in the September after their fourth birthday, but that

attention should be paid to providing a curriculum commensurate with their relative age, experience and level of development. Rose also made some comments about the importance and effectiveness of using play as a tool for learning “The purposes of play in promoting learning and development should be made explicit and planned opportunities made to fulfil them in the primary curriculum” (p 93), which implies that some form of play based pedagogy would be useful in developing the primary curriculum, although he does not make any specific recommendations as to how this could be accomplished.

Dame Tickell, on the other hand suggests that simplifying the assessment criteria for the Foundation Stage and making the links between exceeding the Early Learning goals and Level 1 of the *National Curriculum* would be a useful way of bridging the gap between the two different curricula, However, unlike the *Rose Review*, her recommendations do little to lessen the gap between the way that the Primary and Foundation Stage Curricula are conceptualised. Whereas Rose talks of broadening subject areas and the use of play in the Key Stage 1 curriculum, Tickell takes a developmental approach to school readiness:

Most children begin reception class at age 4, and for most parents and carers this is when school life begins. If children are not ready for this transition or for the move to Year 1, because, for example, they are not yet toilet trained, able to listen, or get on with other children, then their experiences at school could present difficulties which will obstruct their own learning as well as other children’s.  
(page 20)

Tickell advocates early intervention as a way of helping children to be ready or rather to avoid what she calls being ‘unready’ for school (page 19). She does recommend that the early learning goals be slimmed down and more explicit links made between these and the National Curriculum levels, but whilst these recommendations may



make it easier to understand children's progress from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1, the tensions and contradictions in understandings of children as learners remain unchallenged.

A further, more comprehensive, review of primary education was published in 2009; *The Cambridge Primary Review* (Alexander, Armstrong et al.). As well as making recommendations about the primary curriculum, somewhat similar to the Rose Review, the Cambridge Review has made recommendations with regard to children in Year 1. The authors recommend that children up to the age of 6 be included in the Foundation Stage and that the possibility of increasing the statutory school age to 6 in line with other countries in Europe and America be considered. This, they argue, would allow teachers of young children more scope to follow a more 'developmentally appropriate' play based agenda for children up until the age of 6. According to the authors "this would give children enough time to establish positive attitudes to learning and to begin to develop the language and study skills essential to their later progress" (Hofkins and Northen 2009: p17). Again, this is placing a learner-centred curriculum within a developmental framework- children are perceived as needing a learner centred teaching approach because they are not developmentally able to cope with a more content-centred curriculum.

I am somewhat concerned about the link between a learner-centred curriculum and development; Whilst the children that I was working with fall into the age-range whereby a learner-centred approach might be considered appropriate for their stage of development, evidence from several studies involving children of different ages suggests that a degree of learner centeredness is a powerful motivating factor,

especially when allied to feelings of agency. This is an avenue that would be worth pursuing further.

The impact of the *Rose Review* and The *Cambridge Primary Review* on government policy has been minimal; The *Cambridge Primary Review* has been largely ignored and, although the Labour Government was set to make changes based on the *Rose Review* that were due to be introduced into Primary Schools in September 2011, the Coalition Government, which took power in May of 2010, decided not to introduce the reforms and has since commissioned its own review of the *National Curriculum* at both Primary and Secondary level (DfE 2011). The rhetoric of the *remit* for this review is, in some respects, a return to the National Curriculum as it was originally conceived in the 1980s. The Curriculum review is intended to set out the content that children should learn at particular ages, and to step back from making decisions about pedagogy;

It is the Government's intention that the National Curriculum be slimmed down so that it properly reflects the body of essential knowledge which all children should learn and does not absorb the overwhelming majority of teaching time in schools. Individual schools should have greater freedom to construct their own programmes of study in subjects outside the National Curriculum and develop approaches to learning and study which complement it.  
(DfE 2011: p1)

Although in some respects this remit may be seen as a release from the increased government control over the delivery of the curriculum that has occurred over the last three decades, the remit also retains the commitment to setting 'rigorous requirements for pupil attainment, which measure up to those in the highest performing jurisdictions in the world' (p1), which is subject to a separate review (due June 2011). Moreover there is a strong emphasis on the need for schools to prepare children for business and university, which has the potential to exacerbate the top

down pressure that has impacted on the primary curriculum over the last thirty years. The emphasis on higher standards of performance, moreover, is likely to increase rather than ameliorate the tensions that have been highlighted as a problem for teachers in the Reception and Year 1 throughout this thesis; the requirement to deliver specified, subject driven content in a way that is commensurate with understandings of learner-centred teaching.

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Unicef 1990) states that children's views should be taken in to consideration in matters that concern them. The evidence from this study is consistent with other studies that have asked children about their experiences in school. Whilst the majority of children value their school experiences, there is a desire for at least some space in the curriculum where they can make choices about what they do. An integrated curriculum that works with children rather than on them may well help to develop those positive attitudes towards learning that I have argued are important for children's learner identities.

## **Part 5: The Relation of the study to transitions theory**

### **7.51 Readiness**

Whilst a readiness approach to transition has been challenged for some time in the literature on transition (Brooker 2002, Petriwskyj et al. 2005, Dockett et al. 2006), the evidence from this study suggests that understandings of readiness, in terms of both maturational and skills development could be seen to influence the teachers' views about the children and how they managed the transition from the Reception to Year 1, particularly in the way that play was re-introduced into the Year 1 curriculum- ostensibly to provide support for those children who were having

difficulty coping. These findings support findings of other studies such as Carlton and Winsler (1999), Dockett and Perry (2002), and Ellis, (2002a) that readiness constructs dominate in understandings of transition between early years education and school.

It could be argued that the evidence from this study does support a readiness understanding of transition to some extent. The older children involved in the study were more able to manage the change in curriculum without the same level of anxiety than several of the younger children. However, this is mostly likely due to the extra time that they had had in both the Nursery and the Reception, and the fact that they were, in some cases, up to a year older than other children involved in the study. The extra experience that they had gained, both from being at school for longer and being in the world longer meant that they were more confident about being able to cope with the teacher's expectations.

To take this perspective is fundamentally unfair to those younger children who were, by default, less experienced as it assumes that the problem lies with the child rather than a school curriculum, preoccupied with notions of performance and achievement, that is heavily weighted in favour of older children. A readiness construction of transition has been criticised as discriminating against children from minority backgrounds (Petriwskyj et al. 2005, Dockett et al. 2006, Rimm-Kauffman et al. 2000). I would argue that these criticisms also relate to younger children. Notions of readiness are also called into question when one considers the analyses of learner identities undertaken in Chapter 6, which reveals that children's understanding of, and feelings about, their role as learners seems to have a part to play in the way that they cope with difficulty (Dweck 1999, Cigman 2005). I have argued that the way in

which the learning environment is organised and how tasks are presented to children seems to be more salient to the development of positive attitudes to learning and therefore it is the contexts in which children are expected to learn that should be subjected to scrutiny rather than the children.

In the review of literature (chapter 1), I argued that Fisher (2010) has made a very strong argument for the retention of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Year 1 and 2 based on the understanding that, from a developmental perspective, there is very little difference between children of five, six and seven. The evidence from my study would suggest that children do react positively to the kinds of provision advocated by Developmentally Appropriate Practice (EYCG, 1998); allowing children to follow their own interests in play, using their interests and preoccupations as a starting point for planning learning opportunities and developing positive dispositions for learning, for example. A question remains in my mind however about the extent to which this is 'developmentally appropriate practice' or simply effective pedagogy.

Evidence from other studies aimed at eliciting children's perspectives of school suggests that while children may come to realise that they don't know about some things they should know about (Pollard and Triggs 2000), a desire for self-regulation and active engagement in the learning process persists throughout children's school careers (Galton et al 1999b, Burke and Grosvenor 2003, Flutter and Rudduck 2004). To describe a learner-centred curriculum as developmentally appropriate is, for me, problematic. To think of play (as in self-directed activity) as a prop for those children who are too immature to cope with the demands of a more teacher-directed

curriculum is to see its relevance only in terms of the youngest children in the education system and to ignore its potential to contribute to all children's learning through the development of their interests and enthusiasms. However, there is not enough scope in this project, given the ages of the children to explore this notion fully- a more focused project looking in depth at children's understandings of autonomy and learning across a range of ages would have to be undertaken.

### **7.52 Continuity and change**

Understandings of continuity and change could also be seen to influence the transition process at Winterbourne School where the gradual nature of curriculum change was designed to help children to adapt to new ways of working and develop different pupil and learner behaviours. By the time I arrived at the school to begin my field work this process was already well underway in the Reception with the split between Mix-up time and teaching time forming a horizontal transition whereby the children were required to adjust their learner behaviours on a daily basis (Johansson 2007). The evidence from Chapters 4 and 5 suggests that, whatever their stated preferences, the children were able to adapt easily to the changing behavioural expectations of mix up time and teaching time, but that their emotional responses to different learning experiences were heavily dependent upon the way in which they were articulated by the teachers.

It would appear that discontinuity may well cause some difficulties for children- especially when it is allied to uncertainty and anxiety. The children's evidence in in both chapters 4 and 6 suggests, however, that discontinuities, such as moving to the big playground and doing work by themselves, were as likely to produce positive

reactions if the children were confident and happy with the changes (see discussion in part 2). However, advocating a gradual change from one way of working to another does not take into consideration the children's feelings about different experiences. In fact, the extended nature of the change from a largely child-initiated curriculum to a largely teacher-directed curriculum may have served to temper the children's reactions and make them less intense, but did not really reconcile the children to the loss of autonomy and control they experienced as they progressed in Year 1. It may, however have weakened the impact of the children's negative feelings about too much control, thus making them easier for the teachers to manage. The behavioural controls that were implemented through the rewards/sanctions systems in the school also served to restrain the children's reactions. It is notable that when those restraints were lifted, as with the case of a supply teacher (see chapter 6), or the children's relationships with me, they felt much more comfortable in challenging the power dynamic between adult and child. The children's reactions to the more gradual change in curriculum focus imply that it is not necessarily discontinuity in itself that is problematical but that what children are moving from/to that is also of interest when considering curriculum change, which highlights the importance of taking children's views into consideration when working with them.

### **7.53 Transition and identity**

As a part of the research process I introduced a question 'What impact does the transition to Year 1 have on children's understandings of identity within the context of school?' However, this question could also be turned the other way round to ask

‘In what ways do children’s understandings of identity affect their perceptions of the transition to Year 1?’ The relationship between these two questions reflects the integral nature of the relationship between structure and agency that is central to Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1994, Shilling 1998).

At a structural level, I have argued in chapter 3 and chapter 6 that the school organisation, disciplinary structures, teacher expectations and the way in which the teachers prepared the children for the move from the Foundation Stage to Year 1 influenced both the parents’ and the children’s perceptions of what it meant to be a school child. The children also moved into Year 1 with understandings based on their experiences of what it meant to move from one class to another and one teacher to another and also on what they had been told by parents, siblings and friends. These findings accord with the view that adults and other children set up expectations of identity for children before they make the transition (Brooker 2002, Merry 2007). The experience of the move has the potential, therefore, to meet expectations (as it did with Will), come as a welcome surprise (Danny) or as an unpleasant shock (Poppy).

When I was at beginning of this project and was describing its focus to a friend of mine, she said to me “Well, it depends on the child, doesn’t it?” I will admit to being a little floored by that at first, but she was right; it does, to some extent, depend on the child and the interplay between locally produced social identities, a child’s understandings of wider social structures such as gender and understandings of their own personal characteristics that combine to produce a unique perception of the transition. However, I would argue that a focus on the children’s unique



understandings helps us to understand the process of transition and the impact/influence of identity rather better.

Using identity as a focal point for exploring transition allows, I would argue, for a coherent understanding of many of the concerns central to transitions theory. A focus on identity maintains a concern for continuity/discontinuity (Peters 2000, Rimm-Kauffman et al. 2000, Dunlop and Fabian 2002, 2007, Dockett et al. 2006, Seung-lam and Pollard 2006) and for understanding transition as a process of adaptation (Sanders et al. 2005). It also allows us to explore understandings of resilience (Fabian and Dunlop 2007), of strategic action (Pollard and Filer 1999), and the impact of participants' understandings of transition, as well as enabling a more fluid understanding of and critical approach to the study of the contexts of transition.

## **Part 6: The limitations of the study and future research development**

This current study adopted a broadly ethnographic approach to investigate how children's perspectives on school change over the transition from Reception to Year 1. Troman and Jeffrey (2004) argue that the amount of time that is spent in the field is crucial to the success of ethnographic research. Although the main fieldwork took place over 10 months, from July of 2007 to May of 2008, my attendance was episodic rather than continuous. In part this was because I was interested, not in the settling in period that is a part of all transitions, but in how children's thinking was affected by changes in practice once they were used to the different routines, and partly because I was sensitive to the wishes of the teachers to have some time to develop a relationship with their new class before I became a regular presence.

Ideally, I would have spent much more time in the Reception with the children, thus developing a deeper relationship with them that would, hopefully have gained their trust somewhat more quickly, and it would have made the data from the Reception more robust. However, I do feel that I gained sufficient evidence from the children in the Reception to substantiate the conclusions I arrived at in this study. The use of elements from the Mosaic Approach used in this study helped me to gather a variety of data that allowed me to further illuminate what the children were telling me in their informal conversations with me (Clark and Moss 2001, Clark et al. 2005) and I was able to use the data produced with the children to satisfy the purposes of my investigation. The quality of this study, therefore, of this study was not profoundly affected by the comparatively shorter time length in the Reception.

Another possible limitation of my research is that there were not sufficient data on the perspectives of the parents. As the analysis of data progressed, it became clear that parental attitudes were a key factor in shaping the children's responses to the move to Year 1. Whilst I did undertake interviews with parents and teachers, it is possible that recruiting parents to keep a diary (see Pollard 1996), may have strengthened the reliability of the database. Pollard also asked the teachers more directly for their insights into individual children. I did not do this because I was very conscious of a wish to allow the children's perspectives to lead the direction of the project rather than allow teacher's perspectives to colour my own. However, the sensitivity of the children to adults' thinking that I uncovered during the process of analysis indicates that questions aimed at understanding teachers' views of individual children would have been a very useful addition to the data set.

During the course of this study I have become interested in doing further research into children's perspectives on their experiences, and particularly into how their thinking about learning is affected by the nuances of pedagogical practice. It is clear from the work already being done in this area that using children's perspectives on their schooling has a great deal to contribute towards the development of curriculum and pedagogy (see Pollard and Triggs 2000, Clark and Moss 2001, Burke and Grosvenor 2003, Howard 2008, 2010 for example). The limitations of this current study discussed earlier will enable me to plan future research more effectively. For example, sufficient time will be spent before embarking on fieldwork in order to gain children's trust and understanding as a part of the research process. This study also strengthens my interest in curriculum and pedagogy; it has reinforced my views about the importance of paying attention to the ideological bases of curriculum development and the implications that these have for the pedagogical interactions between teachers and children that are at the heart of the educational endeavour.

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## Appendix A- Participant consent letters

### (Parents)



#### **An investigation into the perspectives of children negotiating the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1**

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I would like to ask your permission for ..... to take part in a research project at his/her school.

I am a former teacher and research student at Roehampton University, and I am planning to do some research with children as they move from the Reception to Year 1. I have a current Criminal Records Bureau declaration. Previous studies have shown that some children may find this move quite difficult. The aim of this research is to find out what the children think of the change from the Reception, and how it might affect the way they think about school and learning.

The children will be invited to take part voluntarily in a number of activities, such as taking photographs and talking about them, taking me on tours of the school or classroom and drawing pictures of themselves in school. At the same time, you may be invited to take part in a short interview, which will help to place the children's views in context. Participation in this project is purely voluntary, and I will ensure that the children are aware that they do not have to participate if they do not wish to, and that they can stop at any time.

No photographs that would identify children will be used in any publications resulting from this study. The children will not be named, and precautions will be taken to make sure that any children who participate will not be identified.

It is hoped that children and schools will benefit from this investigation by providing a better understanding of the way in which children feel and think about school and learning. As a thank you for participating, the children will receive a booklet with the photographs and the comments that they have made.

**Name and status of Investigator:**

**Sarah Howe: Research Student**

**Consent Statement:**

I give permission for my child (.....) to take part in this research if they want to. I understand that they are free to take part or withdraw if they wish, and that their identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

I would be willing to take part in a short interview about my child's experience of the transition from the Reception to Year 1.

Signature.....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the investigator, or with my Director of Studies who is:

Name: Christine Skelton  
Contact Address School of Education  
Roehampton University  
Roehampton Lane  
London SW15

Direct Phone No: ...020 8392 3322 Email: ...c.skelton@roehampton.ac.uk<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Christine Skelton was my initial Director of Studies for this project, but left the University at the end of my first year and Professor Kevin Brehony took over.

(Head teacher and teachers)



**An investigation into the perspectives of children negotiating the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.**

I am a former teacher, now undertaking a PhD. I am currently planning a research project on the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. I hold a current CRB check and I have approval from the research board and the ethics board at the university to undertake my research.

Recent research has shown that some children have problems when moving from the Reception Class into Year 1. This research, by inviting children to participate in gathering data, aims to understand better how children experience the move to year 1, and how this experience affects the way in which they think about school and learning.

In order to undertake this project, I will need to work with teachers and children over a prolonged period, one day a week, from the last half term of the Reception Year to the End of the first term in Year 1. I would like to invite ten children from the class to take part in the research, and it will be made clear to them that they do not have to participate if they do not wish to.

The children will be invited to take part voluntarily in a number of activities, such as taking photographs and talking about them, taking me on tours of the school or classroom and drawing pictures of themselves in school. In addition, I would like to interview teachers and parents in order to get some background information, and to undertake observations in the classroom.

The photographs and video footage will be used for analytic purposes only, and will not be used in any published material resulting from the research. The names of the school, teachers, children and parents will be changed in order to protect them from identification, and the location of the school will not be revealed.

In return for your co-operation, I propose to make myself useful in any capacity that will not compromise my research, and to prepare a report for you and your school. The children will receive a booklet with the photographs and the comments that they have made.

If you are willing to consider allowing me to work in your school, could you please e-mail me ([sally.howe@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:sally.howe@tiscali.co.uk)) so that I can arrange an appointment to explain the research further.

My supervisor for this project is Professor Christine Skelton. If you wish to contact her for further information, she can be reached via email [C.Skelton@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:C.Skelton@roehampton.ac.uk)

Yours truly,

Sally Howe (Research Student)

**Name and status of Investigator:**

**Sarah Howe: Research Student**

**Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation, please raise this with the investigator, or with the Dean of School (or equivalent), who is\*

(\*FAO the investigator: if you are a student at Roehampton, complete this section with the details of your Director of Studies. If you are a member of staff, complete this section with the details of your Dean of School.)

Name: Christine Skelton  
Contact Address School of Education  
Roehampton University  
Roehampton Lane  
London SW15

Direct Phone No: ..... Email: .....

I understand that no photographic material will be used in the completed report.

Signature..... Date.....

## Appendix B- interview schedules and sample responses

### B1 Interview schedule for teachers

To elicit to what extent perceptions of children affect their management of the classroom/school,

To elicit to what extent they are influenced by government and school policies.

To elicit teachers' perspectives on the transition between Reception and Year 1.

First of all I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to come in and work in your class in what I know is a very busy time for you. This interview will last between half an hour and forty five minutes. Is this ok?

Talk a little about the research. What I would like from you is a little background information about the way in which you plan, and what you think influences you most when you are teaching. You don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to, and I would also like to remind you that anything that you say will be kept confidential. Before we start, are there any questions you would like to ask me?

1. How do you organise the resources in the classroom?
2. Who has access to them?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the kinds of experiences that you plan for the children and why?

Probe: Explore the school day, how it is organised, and why it is organised in this way

4. What aspects of your classroom organisation do you think works best?
5. Why do you think that is?

Probe: for attitudes to play activities, use of resources, teaching groups use of carpet

6. What constraints, if any, operate in the class/ school /environment
7. What do you think is the most effective way to teach young children? How do you think your ideas have been developed during your teaching career?

Probe: Explore training, experience, other people?

8. How do you think that the way in which you plan the curriculum supports your understandings of how children learn?
9. Thinking about the children's learning, what are you most pleased with this year? What do you think has gone really well?
10. Can you identify any specific influences on your approach to planning for your class?

Probe: explore planning procedures, school policies, national curriculum (FS)

11. What sorts of experiences have you planned to prepare the children for going into Year 1?

## B2 Sample interview with teacher (Ms Arthur, Reception)

SH: I just want to stress that anything you say to me will be in complete confidence. The names will all be changed and I won't report anything to anybody, I will be very discreet, I promise you. And, er, if there are any questions you don't want to answer, just say so,

Ms A: OK, all right

First of all I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to come in and work in your class in what I know is a very busy time for you. This interview will last between half an hour and forty five minutes. Is this ok?

What I would like from you is a little background information about the way in which you plan, and what you think influences you most when you are teaching. You don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to, and I would also like to remind you that anything that you say will be kept confidential. Before we start, are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Ms A: No, I don't think so, we have already talked about it, haven't we?

SH: How long have you been teaching?

Ms A: Teaching for... This is my f...; it will be about 4 years.

SH: Four years

Ms A: Yeh, and er I was a nursery nurse before that for about 5

SH: Right, so you started off as a Nursery Nurse, and then you trained as a teacher.

Ms A: Well, I had my degree, and then I went and did my NVQ in childcare, then did my PGCE. I had a place to do my PGCE after my degree, but just felt that I needed that (yeh) experience first and then kind of did it all the topsy turvey way (the long way round! Laugh) Yeh.

SH: and so you always wanted to work with the younger age group?

Ms A: Yeh, pure... because I find it difficult to erm, I find it really difficult to teach the older ones because I just think it is too formal and er not enough hands on, and doing, which isn't any fault of the teachers, or anything, it's just the way the system goes, that you can't possibly plan, you know, hundreds of activities when you've only got you, the teacher and your class, so I think I prefer the way that they learn down here.

SH: , And so ... it's a particular style of learning that appeals to you

Ms A: Yeh, yeh definitely

SH: Could you ... describe that a bit to me, the sort of things that you think are important when they (er down in) when they are in the reception?

Ms A: Well, er, child centred, a child centred approach, um, to learning, be it, you know, you can be more impulsive, if you see a child who is interested in a particular thing, like we had this year, we had a real interest in volcanoes. And so that just took off, you know, and then we just changed what we had originally planned, and we, you know, particularly in [name deleted] Class, once again, it's very child centred in that I might be doing something different to Mrs H (parallel class).

SH: Right, so you will change your plans depending (yeah) on what the children are interested in?

Ms A: Yeah, if it means that the children will get more out of it than what we originally planned then yeah. And it was really nice, because we did science around, um, we actually made a volcano, and then we er made it erupt, you know, we got the vinegar and the bicarbonate of soda. Then we linked it to literacy and we did a book about volcanoes and so it was just really nice, and we had an interest in like treasure maps, so we done treasure maps, and pirates. So yeah, that kind of approach to learning and I have worked a lot with erm schemas as well, I don't know if you know. (Yes I know) and the way children learn, and sort of tuning in to that.

SH: Could you give me some examples of the sort of way in which you have done that? (Schemas?) Schemas

Ms A: Like Transpo... at the very early stages they are transporters aren't they, you know and it is about allowing really children to transport and not seeing as a 'No you can't take all the food into the sand (anxious voice)' you know, and it's just allowing them to do that because that is the way

that they are making sense of things isn't it? And, um, enveloping, so we had plenty of wrapping activities you know, wrapping presents and things like that. Um ... I'm just really into tuning into the children's interests.

SH: could you ... um ... just tell me a little bit about why the way in which you organise the class-how it you think works?

Ms A: like mix up time and things like that? Um, well mix up time works because it allows them to make independent choices it allows them to move freely between nursery and reception, so where they feel they need to be. It gives them obviously access to outdoors (yeah), um, I think it's a good way of developing friendships and confidence, and allowing them to lead their own learning you know, providing, you've provided the resources and the activities for them to learn, you know, (yeah), but then they are able to move their own learning on as well independently, (yeah) which is nice. And then we kind of, we're leading up to obviously the whole class carpet sessions, and preparing them, unfortunately, for (yeah, so is that) for the year one ...

SH: So the whole class carpet sessions, have they moved on?

Ms A: Well yeah, they initially started like very short erm singing... like maths would be just a counting song or something to do with number um and likewise literacy again, it would be something ... start off with a song, or something, and a really short activity, but that will be it, and then kind of just working up more and more to that and recently, we've started doing the first part of literacy on the carpet and then moving them on to activities at the tables and we'll be able to work with one group, and then obviously three groups are working independently -well that's the idea (laugh). Well it's that constant struggle, isn't it, of um, there's not enough adults, really, and the issues surrounding, 'cos Reception's quite a difficult one, because in the nursery there are clear guidelines for staff ratios and year one, there are clear guidelines, but Reception is kind of your grey area isn't it? It's like, yes, one teacher to thirty children, but there's no guidelines to what support is given

SH: so you think it is a process of negotiation with the...

Ms A: Yes, it can be a bit of a struggle, because you are only trying to do the best for your children, and this year I've been really lucky in that I've had a brilliant class and y'know, we've managed really well, the children have come out achieving; exceeding their targets but um, last year was very different y'know, so

SH: so you think it makes a difference year on year?

Ms A: well I had thirty January children last year. It was different, so y'know, you've got to have the input early on to y'know for it to make that difference later on, or you are going to have problems.

SH: So you think there is a definite disadvantage to coming in in January?

Ms A: No, No, not necessarily the um well, there's proven, it's been proven isn't it that, of course, they've had two terms, and the other children have had three, so of course they are going to have a term less of that, that y'know reception..

SH: Now you said that you didn't think that these children weren't going to have any trouble going into year 1

Ms A: Well I don't feel that , y'know, obviously apart from the normal day to day things, they might, you know, any child would encounter, but I don't have any worries about them actually moving on, they seem to be, compared to my last class, you know last year I would say ' oh you are going on to year 1 soon, and they would be like 'no' and it was quite a....

SH: so they felt quite apprehensive?

Ms A: Yeh, whereas this year it is very much positive sort of thing and again, last year they found it hard when they were having to have break times with the rest of the school, so it was a bit overwhelming, but we have been taking them, you know getting them ready and taking them like once or twice a week with the rest of the school at break time, and they've been absolutely fine, they just are different, different children with different, even the January children, it's not about January, September. It's just the cohort we have this year, I haven't had any problems, particularly in this class, I can't talk about the other class.

SH: So it's particularly your class. Um, could you tell me a bit more about the things that you do to



prepare children for going up, so you do longer carpet time sessions

Ms A: yeh, and taking them out into the big playground. Er, we have links with like the year 1 teachers, I will often send children up to show off, you know to show the teachers their work, and likewise, we'll read a story for each other's classes, Um, what else do we do. Again, it's little things like encouraging them to be more independent when they come up to Year 1.

SH: When you say more independent, what do you mean by independent?

Ms A: Erm, less reliant upon the adult, you know things like sorting out conflict themselves and giving them strategies to do that, which is you know part of the progression from when they first come in to when they leave us, so it's very much you, know continuously coming up to us, because they can't solve their conflicts on their own, and we are sort of giving them strategies to do that. Um how else do we do it, again like dressing - P.E. Initially when they first come in you have the - the whole P.E. session is spent on changing whereas obviously now, you know, it's not a particular, oh this is so they can be ready for year 1, but it's obviously a learning curve, it's not just the curriculum it's a lot of self-help skills isn't it? they start at the Nursery really basic sharing and that is continuing through

SH: So actually it's a continual process you don't see it as getting them up to a point where they are ready

Ms A: No you don't think about a month before, oh no, I'd better start, so it is continuous really, and we have circle times, where things that are concerning us about year 1, and again I have had no concerns, so we've done that and we have, something that I've introduced this year is the file that they have, the prof.. the folder with all their work, I just think that it is important that they get a chance to look at their file not just their parents, so |I've spent some time with them looking through their files and they love it, because there's photos in there and their work, and they say, Oh I remember when we did that, and they say Oh, I couldn't write that tricky word then, and you know it's such a nice thing for their self-esteem and really making them feel that they are ready for that transition really, and just to reflect back on how much they have changed, because they can't do that for themselves, unless

SH: So you can actually looking at the progress they've made over the year?

Ms A: Yeah, so if you actually say to them what can you do now what you couldn't do in Reception, you wouldn't get that much feedback really, but when they actually see their work, and you talk to them about how they have changed you can

SH: yes one of them was talking to me this morning and showing me his special book and we looked at the first picture and he said, oh my first picture wasn't very good

Ms A: Ooh, and that's point of the special books, that's the beginnings of writing isn't it, the mark making, the drawing, yeh and they do and you can even see it as well, how their pictures develop and change.

SH: What do you think you are most pleased about this year, in terms of, how they have come on?

Ms A: I'm just amazed by how sensible, how independent how much they have achieved in literacy and maths, um I can't put my finger on one thing, they are just an all-round... I could move up with them all the way to year 6, they are just amazing, they are really are.

SH you feel as though you've really ...

Ms A: yeh, they've gelled as a class, um, my class last year did as well though, It's really weird I can't put my finger on one sort of ... You know initially I spent a lot of time on um friendship and friends to do with that, and just making it really fun, because the Nursery, making it really fund and practical, and it still is, it hasn't changed that much. And hopefully in Year 1, that will become the, you know the first term is supposed to be like Reception isn't it, so

SH: So the idea is to carry on the sort of practical activities into year 1 is that right?

Ms A: : yeh, well I don't know what really is planned to be honest, so I'm not entirely sure how they do things, so that is supposed to be the idea isn't it, but then we are all kind of restricted by um how much you can do when there is only you.

SH: So you really feel that the fact that it's just you in the class is a constraint?

Ms A: I don't think it has been this year, but only because I haven't had any particular kind of SEN Children, any issues, but when you have got that, it can really affect, you know, it can have more of an effect on the SEN children, you know, you can't move them on as you would like to, because you can't split yourself into, it's the nationwide problem isn't it? It's not just this school's or

SH: So you would feel more comfortable if you had like , presumably a full time Nursery nurse

Ms A: Full time, definitely, I know some schools do and some don't and yeh, definitely.

SH: Are there any other constraints that you can think of, to you actually doing things that you think you would like to do

Ms A: Resources...(giggle)

SH: Any examples in particular that you would like?

Ms A: Erm, it's more like, erm, if you want, you know it's very impulsive in the early years and that morning you might think, oh yesterday so and so said to me that he'd love the, you know, something out tomorrow or to do this tomorrow, and you just want to be able to go to the cupboard and say yeh, say oh yeh, we've got all that for that. But you can't, because you would spend all the morning searching for something but you don't have it, so... We've been really lucky this year and fortunate in that parents have been able to do this, but we started asking for £5 every half term like they do in Nursery and we actually carried it through to Reception. They've been really generous, because before, if I was out and about shopping and I saw something, I would feel this is going to be such a struggle to get the money back, and you didn't mind now and then, but it adds up, but now it's really nice, because now I think oh I can get it. I've bought some lovely things, like you know science things that that you wouldn't get sort of through the school, so it's been really...and we've introduced cooking, which wasn't happening before. And I've set up the sensory program - it's something that I did at my last school, so er we've been taking groups in there to work with the sensory equipment as well.

SH: So what sort of things have you got in there

Ms A: like fibre optics, glow balls, projector, voice distortion box - really nice they've loved it, but the whole school, the idea is that the whole school would use it and so far it's kind of got up to year 1 really using it on a regular basis, but again, the feedback from the teachers further up is that how can you take a small group in there when you haven't got anyone to take the rest of them.

SH: So again there is a restriction on Adults

Ms A: yeh, I f this was a Scottish school there would be 1-18 wouldn't it? That's what they have introduced haven't they? Right the way through primary. Well further up or school it's about 1-20 isn't it? the numbers are much lower

SH: The other thing that I was going to ask you is, when you are planning what do you refer to in terms of .. You have spoken about leading from the children and taking some ideas from the children. What other things do you refer to?

Ms A: We have topics, so we plan around the six areas of learning, we plan our topic and link the six areas into that, like we have mini-beasts, we linked literacy, we had big books, we had maths, um things like, you know all practical activities, up so there is you still have that, you know, the long term planning, the medium term planning and weekly, but it's nice. Whereas the National Curriculum is you have to teach this, you have to teach this, the areas of learning are much more free and leave it more down to the expertise of the teacher really, in knowing how the children learn, and it's always better to go with children, you know because you can teach number through their interest in treasure maps and you can do counting how many steps. I think you can be a lot more creative in the early years, definitely.

SH: is that what appeals to you?

Ms A: yeh, I couldn't have- this is you objective and this is how you have to deliver it, oh it would drive me mad- you know as adults we learn better through things we're interested in, through hands on -doing don't we, and why.. I know it's not as bad as it used to be, it's no one's fault particularly

SH: do you have any policies that are particular to the Early Years or do they go right through the

school?

Ms A: No, I think they ... like the behaviour policy, obviously like we've got rules more adapted to the early years, um,

SH: I was thinking more in terms of learning policies, or do you take them

Ms A: No I don't think so it's just the way the curriculum allows us to be in the early years, it's just a bit more freed up and.. There's whole school teaching and learning, um sort of policies

SH: Right, so you have a whole school teaching and learning policy

Ms A: yeh, I think there's um yeh teaching and learning

SH: and does that include the progression from the Early Years right the way through to year 6?

Ms A: It's the policy I'm not sure what

SH: Do they differentiate between the year groups? or do they

Ms A: I don't even know if there is actually a policy as such or just a kind of general ethos almost.

SH: Right, so it's more of an ethos rather than an actual policy in terms of teaching and learning. it seems to be quite keen on sort of practical ...

Ms A: Yeh, I mean the whole school is like lots of emphasis on the creative and praise of talents and you know, really nice sort of friendly atmosphere isn't it generally. It's a lovely school

SH: Going back to my very first question. When you think about children's learning, um, what sort of things. What do you draw on when you think about children's learning? What sort of ideas do you draw on in terms of you thinking about how they learn? The ways in which they learn?

Ms A: What I spoke about like the child initiated?

SH: Would you say that these things come from your training, or from your experience or?

Ms A: Er I'd say experience, which is why I didn't want to do my degree, which was in biology and which was nothing to do with children and then go and do a PGCE, a year does not prepare you to go into a classroom and teach I don't think. So yes, I just found that I basically went into, I worked as a supply nursery nurse, and I had experience of so many different schools and nurseries and I got so many ideas from staff. from children. I worked at Froebel, the nursery in, Roehampton, you know it's like a real Froebelian approach and at the time the nursery was amazing. That was how I got my knowledge of schemas and a child centred approach to learning and all that sort of stuff and I have tried to take all the good bits out of everything I've seen and take it with me. But, having said experience, my experience as a trainee teacher also taught me a lot and I had a really good teacher that I worked with in my last block and especially when it comes to class management she was just amazing. You know when you just think how does she do it? How does she keep them all, and I just thought hey, I'm just going to copy her. And just things that she did. They worked so well, you know, why not take with me. And you know the photographs that I showed you, that was an idea that I took from working in a nursery and lots of sort of picked things up as I've gone along really. Because I don't have children, I have nieces and nephews, so really it has been just through my ...

SH: through your experience. Would you say there were any particular theories that you work from or not?

Ms A: No it's one thing, er, no. I mean you could probably link theories to classroom practice; you don't learn from theory, you learn from going in and finding your way, thinking, oh, that didn't work, why didn't it? Or that did. No I can't say theory... Well there are theories aren't there, child centred and Steiner Schools and all that kind of stuff, but I can't say that I take from that and think oh yes I am going to use that in my practice, it's kind of. You kind of do it. It's not a conscious thing. You take up from my experiences and you just hopefully take the best of it all and use that in your everyday teaching. I think as well in the early years you work much more as a team. It's a lot less... you depend on each other as well, you have to work together.

SH: How do you think that works in the sense of, because you have a lot of experience and you have a lot of ideas and they bring forward a lot of ideas, and does it work well sharing these all together?

Ms A: Yeh definitely. You obviously come in, you have hurdles that you have to encounter, like for example in my first teaching job was in a nursery and I was the teacher ns I had two o nursery

nurses and I was in the highest position, but I was the youngest out of all of the team and I was the least, obviously I was new as well and they had been there for years so initially I kind of had that, not "What does she know?" but "I've been here ages and I'm not going to just change because someone's come in" And it's just about developing that relationship. You know because I've been in the position where I've been a nursery nurse and I've gone into schools and been treated like a slave basically, you know you're a nursery nurse so can you go and clean the paint pots sort of thing So I hope that I value the experience that a NN has as well and I don't, you know, I'm willing to change phooey knickers if I have to.

SH: Ok, I think I've finished, but if I have any other questions would it be ok to come and see you?

Ms A: ok, yeh, fine,

SH: so just a quick summary. You feel as though you work with a child centred approach; that you like to be able to plan and take from the children.

Ms A: : Yes, obviously within my own constraints again, you know the powers that be and so on

SH: What would those constraints be?

Ms A: Well there's so many people in your team that you have to take on board what everybody, if it was just me, I would just come in to school and it would really be a lot freer, the way that I believe that you know, because I'm quite comfortable, you know, I think it depends on the person as well. The teacher, because some teachers do like to have that sort of, well I have to know what I'm teaching and how, and I'm not really, so. Well you've got the constraints of the curriculum haven't you and what the government is telling you to teach and you've got the constraints of you know of team members and how they teach because they've got their own styles haven't they and um, you've got all of that. Now I'm not saying that I would come in and oh you can do whatever you like, but I'm quite happy, you know I feel quite comfortable if I come in and I've got children upset, or I've got someone who has brought something in, that's the most amazing thing and the children are so amazed by it. I'm not going to say well sorry, I'm just going to ignore that and I'm not going to acknowledge that your upset because I've got to teach the objective today. You know, It's got to be hasn't it

SH: So you feel that a certain amount of flexibility is important

Ms A: yes, and especially with the younger ones

SH: and you actually feel that you have used the children's ideas in your planning and their sort of schemas

Ms A: yeh, their ways of learning and so on.

SH it's quite interesting actually; one of the children was going round taking lots of photos of boxes and things. Really kind of keep everybody in and saying things about containment really

Ms A: : yes, it would be nice, when you are doing all these observations and trying to move them on, you know 'you've got to do this, you've got to do this, um, sometimes it's so nice just to be with the children. You know, not

(Interrupted by someone needing the room)

Ms A: yes, just to be and have conversations with them and you know, it's just lovely

SH: and you talked about mix up time and you said that it's really good for helping children to make independent choices and to move freely around and helping them develop their friendships. And in terms of actually preparing them for Y1, lengthen the carpet sessions, so presumably give them more of a structure to sort of literacy sessions and numeracy sessions.

Ms A: Yeh, but it's been very gradual, literally from the first day in Reception until now, you know it hasn't been a sudden thing,

SH: So it's been a really gradual thing, spending more time

Ms A: Yeh, spending more time and yeh and more focussed things, oh and brain gym we do.

SH: And brain gym is er?

Ms A: Brain Gym? It's all about basically the left and right hemispheres of the brain and we don't actually cross over, because whatever happens on the left goes to the right side of the body and it's about crossing over those and that enhances co-ordination, memory, so yeh, we do brain gym

SH: and then you have been taking them into the playground so that they can get used to it.

Ms A: yeh, they're quite looking forward to it. And when I say right, off you go to year 1, they are all 'OK' and I'm like no not really, I was only joking

SH: and you have been, so you see it less as a cut-off point and more as a progression

Ms A: yeh, hopefully

SH: so you are moving them from one place to another, and you are moving them on from there

Ms A: Yes

SH: And you've been helping them to reflect on their work and show how they have progressed from in the Reception, and in terms of constraints, you think it is mostly actually not having extra bodies in the classroom to help out

Ms A: professional bodies yeh.

SH: yes and it would be nice to have a full time nursery nurse on your wish list, and also having resources to be a bit more

Ms A: the resources aren't bad, again it's not the school, and it's just schools are restricted by budget. It's just one of those things. The reason I've got used to having really good resources is that I've worked in a nursery school where all the funding went into the nursery, and also it was a beacon school so they got extra money.

SH: and when you are planning a topic, you plan around the 6 areas of the curriculum

Ms A: the curriculum for the foundation stage, yeh,

SH: have you seen the new early years' foundation stage? Do you think it's going to make much difference?

Ms A: Well just that it's obviously from birth to five but no, not a great deal, it's not that different, we actually went through it and highlighted the differences and there are very few with regards to reception. So no, not really, it shouldn't do.

SH: And er, you think that you work around a topic, but that is subject to change

Ms A: but not, you still do everything that you have planned for but (Interrupted again, interview terminated)

## Appendix C- sample analyses of children's data

### C1 Belinda's mosaic- Reception

<b>Belinda Reception</b>	<b>routines</b>	<b>people</b>	<b>Display/learning</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>play</b>
<b>photographs</b>	Book box Dinnermoney pot Housepoints Teacher's desk chair	Adam Ms H	Farmer's visit White board	toilets	
<b>Observations</b>	Lining up at whistle Sitting on carpet with legs crossed	Sitting very close to teacher playing with	Listening to story – sitting close to teacher		Playing hospitals with group of girls
<b>Conversations</b>	Book box important to keep books tidy Need chair for drawing so don't get a sandy bottom or dirty bottom Name on board if you are naughty Housepoints for good listening and good tidying Bell is important because have to listen to Ms Arthur Good listening on the carpet Lunch stickers Taking dinner money box to the office- fun Need to listen and cross your legs and not kneel up Doors closed so no one will	Friend important never say bad words about them Love chatting with my daddy Adam best friend- likes to play with him If someone is naughty Ms H shouts at them Made a joke for daddy	Sit on chair to do work Do special work on white board with Ms Arthur Ms H (other rec teacher) helps the children do everything they need to do. Farmer came- lifted dog's paw really gently – loved the farm animals	Doll lying down- dead (giggle) Likes drawing Jack was head teacher for the day (Yr 6 child) Do writing if Ms P told us to Toilet is important – because you can't wee-wee on the floor (giggles) Toilet floor nice because all purple and sparkly	Stilts- not hard Not like Polly Pocket's because not enough room Play with mobilo (construction) gets sand in eyes

	run away				
<b>drawings</b>	Don't like sitting on carpet all day Like bell and housepoints	Don't like it when no one plays with me Like playing chase outside	Like drawing		Don't like playing in the sand
<b>parent</b>	Doesn't talk about school	Had good friendships Distressed when father late to pick up	Easy child to teach- liked her teacher got impression she was very good student		

Rules and routines seem to be important to Belinda, she seems like a confident learner, and confident with her friends. Get the impression that she feels she has outgrown Reception toys- lacking in challenge and maybe a bit babyish.

## C2: Comparison between Rec and Y1 – Beth

	Reception	Year 1	Comments
Play with friends	<b>Conversations-</b> Ayisha- best friend <b>Photographs-</b> Best Friend; Friend; playing outside; playing cats  <b>Drawings-</b> Likes play with friends <b>Observations-</b> playing chase in playground with Ayisha and other children	<b>Conversations-</b> Ayisha; play in playground, get energy; not being friends, play with bits and bobs; starting to play with other friends; <b>Photographs-</b> my friend Ben <b>Observations-</b> with Ayisha playing with found materials. Talking to Ayisha in class; working with Ayisha in PE	Ayisha was a constant in Beth's life throughout the time I was there. They fell out often, but they were always together during the playtimes that I saw. Mother was concerned that single friendship not healthy
Play with equipment	<b>Conversations</b> - Sand; Polly pockets  <b>Photographs-</b> Polly Pockets; Sand Tray; Drawing/painting	<b>Conversations-</b> play with Jessie; (toy dog)  <b>Photographs-</b> Jessie	Keener to play with people rather than with things- not concerned with equipment
Outdoor play	<b>Conversations</b> <b>Photograph-</b> Nursery playground	<b>Conversations-</b> nursery rec go out whenever they like, long lunch time; play time; going on the monkey bars	Interesting that long lunch play was valued more highly than play in Reception
Work	<b>Photos-</b> Farmer's visit ; Life Cycle ; Teacher equipment Ms A writing on the board; making up a sentence to write on the board; talked about touching the animals and making pictures <b>Observations-</b> upset because doesn't know what to do (making life-cycle of chick)	<b>Conversations-</b> Likes writing but scared at first because worried getting it wrong. in bottom group easier work and gets help from teacher; Dislikes sitting on the carpet <b>Observations-</b> crying because didn't know how to write (supply teacher), Confused about phonics activity	More likely to focus on topics in Reception and on writing in Year 1. Much more anxiety noted in Year 1 compared to Reception. Seems to gain confidence from being with the teacher- in both classes- big concern with getting things wrong. Reaction seems more extreme when faced with something or someone new
self	<b>Conversations-</b> being shy; best friend; Brother; being shy at first and hiding away and separate; Likes being silly with friend	<b>Conversations-</b> ; bringing toys in for show and tell; being shy; worried at first but used to teacher; grandma and granddad clever,  <b>Photos-</b> Drawer; Show and Tell toy;	Appears to find new people and situations daunting- gets used to it. Likes link between home and school with show and tell.



	Reception	Year 1	Comments
Pupil	<p><b>Conversations</b> -being good, not talking; not talking in the lunch hall; having name on board if naughty being quiet at lunch time;</p> <p><b>Photographs</b>- teacher's chair; closed door keeps children safe</p> <p><b>Observations</b>- sitting quietly on carpet with legs crossed. Hand up to answer a question.</p>	<p><b>Conversations</b> - Taking Jessie home if you have been really good; Wants to stay at school; Bobby and Alfie being naughty, not getting on with work; being cross with others not working ; always listen and always know what to do;</p> <p><b>Photographs</b>-Sitting on Carpet; Walking in corridor; Writing name on work</p> <p><b>Drawing</b>-sitting cross-legged arms folded on carpet, writing name on work</p> <p><b>Observations</b>- chosen to do a job for teacher- talks proudly to friend.</p>	Real focus on being good- knowing the rules. Seems to become more important in Year 1
Learner	<p><b>Conversations</b>-</p> <p><b>Photographs</b>- white board with life cycle; display of farmer's visit</p>	<p><b>Conversations</b>- worried about doing the work wrong having to do lots of writing but likes it.</p> <p><b>Drawings</b>- Writing,</p>	.

### C3- identity summary (Kieran)

Kieran						
gender	Playing with Tom,	Challenging me	Playground games	The only real gendered behaviour that I noticed with Kieran was the way in which he would challenge me by calling me names.		
age	Not liking being four	Being a big brother	Kieran was one of the youngest children taking part in the study, and he did not like the distinction between the younger and older children in the Reception, which coloured his experience. He was the oldest in his family, and very proud of his position as big brother, which conflicted with his position as one of the youngest children in the class			
pupil	Getting on with it	'telling' on his friends for misbehaviour	Independent away from the teacher	Kieran was very keen to be seen as a 'good pupil' to the extent that it impacted on his relationship with his 'best friend' Tom.		
learner	Liking play	Learning about Dinosaurs	Making menu for cafe	Writing stories	Cant' do the work	Equates more to an incremental theory of intelligence. Alth
Although he seemed to be happy when he was in the Reception, Kieran was looking forward to going into Year 1 and doing harder work. In Year 1 he revealed that he did not like the Reception because- he did not like being little, and he did not like being four. Kieran was extremely keen to be seen as conforming to expectations- possibly because of his desire to be seen as one of the big children. Of all the children involved in the study he was happiest with explicit teaching/instructions and seemed a little hesitant when engaged in open ended activities. His mother was concerned that he was						

#### C4- All children- comparison between Rec and y1- identity

Comparison between Rec and Y1 - self (interview evidence)

	Reception	Year 1	Comments
Displays anxiety	<b>Beth</b> – being shy	<b>Beth</b> – being shy and doing the work wrong. Reinforced by George <b>Ollie</b> - reaction to not being good at something	
Displays confidence	<b>Belinda</b> – walking on stilts not tricky; <b>Will</b> – reading a book at home; counting up to twenty	<b>Belinda</b> – reading ability Beth – never being shy, good singer <b>Danny</b> – Doing homework without help <b>David</b> – tackling writing task. <b>George</b> – Really good at recorders. <b>Poppy</b> –teacher praise, counting, getting on with work, doing spelling test	
Talking about self	<b>Beth</b> - being good, not talking; having a sentence on the board; being shy and separate; <b>Belinda</b> - loves chatting, joking with daddy; likes toilets; lifting dog's leg gently.  <b>Lena</b> - likes to make friends; just got here; have fun <b>Danny</b> - stay safe in school; play in playground; water to stop dehydration; playing with toys; <b>David</b> - likes dinosaurs; playing with water;	<b>Beth</b> - being cross with others not working; having to do lots of writing but likes it. Wants to stay at school; in bottom group easier work, help; being shy.  <b>Belinda</b> - likes play; gets dressed quickly at P.E. only one to say 2 h's; hands tire when writing. Change finger grip; likes toilets only like toilets (lots) not bored; identifying pictures of self; being in blue house getting house points to go to party; likes junk food; likes playing with Lego- gardens, not boys; playing with older children; getting spitted ( with rain); recycling bin; finds self on the displays  <b>Danny</b> - talks about being in Reception and liking play; looking after new comers; being cheeky; liking football; liking activities; favourite colour gold;  <b>David</b> - likes his own work; nice smile, being small and getting bigger and faster; owning work; being like dad and brother; drawing self with big fat stomach. <b>George</b> - being different. Learning by self, proud.	Sense of identity is reflected in what they say. E.g. Beth- being shy, a bit nervous in need of support. (see field notes and observations for corroboration). + Ollie- being the best/tallest/smarest. Feels the need to be right 9 also corroborated by other material, shown in always wanting to be right. Sense of identity is continued through the transition, but there may be some threats to it – Ollie being the smartest, some children more challenged than others. People like Will, Danny etc. more stable and not threatened. Kieran and Beth both heavily identify

	<p><b>George-</b> loves learning, exciting</p> <p><b>Kieran-</b> identifying self on photograph</p> <p><b>Will-</b> identifying self on displays; finding self; identifying own work on displays; finding book bag; touching the donkey;</p> <p><b>Ollie-</b> <i>cousin in japan</i>; brother, talked about stuff he'd made and going into Y1.</p> <p><b>Poppy</b> – loves learning</p> <p><b>Lena-</b> hair colour</p> <p><b>Tom-</b> being funny; likes drawing and colouring; likes teacher (projected); not knowing things; doesn't like being told off.</p>	<p><b>Kieran</b> – Working hard; Not liking reception stuff because getting older;</p> <p><b>Will-</b> showing knowledge; maths; happy to leave things to finish off later; Characterises self by likes; ambition- want to be on highest reading level; likes everything in school; lunchtime in particular; likes maths particularly; improving as you get older.</p> <p><b>Ollie-</b> too big for nursery playground; kicking butt at Wii; smartest and tallest in the class; likes being good at things; always good at stuff.</p> <p><b>Poppy</b> – being in a bigger class; lovely, flower name; likes going round the school; having own space; being confident, good at counting, relaxed</p> <p><b>Lena-</b> having a non-regulation top; getting into trouble for not doing work; knowing work already; not listening; liking appearance.</p> <p><b>Tom-</b> likes self because funny; losing teeth; going to be in yr2, 3, 4 etc; being younger, but faster; Doesn't like writing- can't do it, doesn't know the letters;</p>	<p>with 'good' pupil persona, not being able to do the work is a threat to that. Similarly Ollie, not being in top group, or not being able to do something straight away a threat to his understanding of himself as smart. David initially very threatened by lack of confidence/facility with a pencil a big threat - caused much difficulty. For all the children, a sense of getting bigger important- but look at Belinda and Ollie (probably the most experienced/accomplished/eldest) Identifying more with older children and with things outside the classroom.</p>
Talking about home	<p><b>Belinda-</b> mummy's name, joking and chatting with daddy; not liking daddy to go into darkroom.</p> <p><b>Beth-</b> Brother</p> <p><b>Danny-</b></p> <p><b>David-</b></p> <p><b>George-</b> book bags to</p>	<p><b>Belinda-</b> mum giving her chicks; showing mum what to do at school; daddy telling her about finger grip; playing in daddy's office; not being helpful or tidy at home; show and tell.</p> <p><b>Beth-</b> taking Jessie home; bringing toys in for show and tell;</p> <p><b>Danny-</b> Parents call him Cheeky Charlie; loves doing homework;</p> <p><b>David-</b> making a book with his dad at home; show and tell; playing at home; being like dad and brother</p> <p><b>George-</b> not sure if likes being at home better; mum takes him on</p>	

	take pictures and letters home <b>Kieran-</b> <b>Will-</b> book bags; reading at home; taking things home; bringing in lunch bag;	interesting trips; daddy tells him things; <b>Lena-</b> , breaking daddy's computer <b>Kieran-</b> likes show and tell; <b>Will-</b> playing on Wii; baby snake in tummy (mum pregnant); likes reading to mum and dad- more relaxed; playing on Dad's computer; Doing homework with parents;	This is quite a contrast to school, where Will is very self-sufficient - do things independently.
Talk about friends	<b>Beth</b> – best friend		

## Appendix D – sample classification and framing of activity in Year 1 term1

Activity	Classification of instructional discourse	Framing of instructional discourse	Classification of regulatory discourse	Framing of regulatory discourse	Children's reactions
Making Woody hats- cutting out cardboard template and covering with foil	Teacher demonstrates activity for children to follow	Little room for improvisation	Fun activity, plenty of interaction between children		
Making a graph of the children's favourite Toy Story character- children are to ask each other	Teacher demonstrates activity- hands out sheets for them to colour. Instructs them to sit in their groups and ask each other and then move on	Task is clearly defined,	Great deal of movement around the classroom. teacher joins in with the activity	The children have some choice in deciding who they are going to ask when.	Belinda- goes around asking everyone and colouring in her chart very carefully.
Show and tell – children bring in items from home to talk about	Ritualised- short presentation, children allowed three questions each	Teacher defines parameters, but children lead the activity	Rules are clearly defined	Children lead activity Policed by children for the most part.	All children like show and tell- Lena in particular likes it  George – asks lots of questions
Write minimum of 2 sentences in a diary	Ritualised daily activity- writing practice	Task very clearly defined, but children free to write what they want			Will- divides his time between writing very slowly and looking around at other children. Lots of rubbing out  Poppy- seeking help with spellings

## Appendix E: Time table of field visits

		Time table of field visits																																
Jun-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		No visits: settling in	
Jul-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Aug-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Sep-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30			
Oct-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Nov-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		No visits: settling in	
Dec-07		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Jan-08		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Feb-08		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29				
Mar-08		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Apr-08		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30			
May-08		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		
Jun-08		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30			
Key																																		